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Vol. XV.

Published Every
Week.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., May 17, 1882.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 186

THE BLACK BRAVO; or, THE TONKAWAY'S TRIUMPH. A ROMANCE OF THE FRIO RANCH.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DARK DASHWOOD," "WILD WILL, THE MAD RANCHERO," "KIT CARSON, JR," ETC., ETC., ETC.



WITH FIERCE THUDS THESE KNIVES PIERCED FLESH AND WOOD FIRMLY, FASTENING THE HAND OF THE DASTARDLY WRETCH TO THE OPEN DOOR.

The Black Bravo;

OR,

The Tonkaway's Triumph.

A Romance of the Frio Ranch.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(MAJOR SAM S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "DARK DASHWOOD," "WILD WILL,"
"THE MAD RANCHERO," "KIT CARSON, JR.,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLOWER OF THE FRIO.

Our first scene opens on the Rio Frio, a tributary of the Rio Nueces.

Both these streams wind through the vast stock-raising districts of Southern Texas. It is on the bank of the first-named, and directly south from the Bandera Hills, that we wish to draw the attention of the reader to events which occurred one and twenty years ago.

Winding snake-like from the hills just mentioned, its waters lovingly shielded from the sun by towering pecan trees and oaks—the moss draped branches of which formed a verdant archway—was a small stream or creek.

This stream flowed into the Rio Frio; and, at the point of land formed by the river and the creek, stood a log-cabin. This cabin was built, as is customary in the South-west, with a wide veranda on the front, toward the river, and an open space in the middle of the rough structure, which allowed the cool northerly winds free passage.

Situated in the fork, with running water of some depth to the east and south, gave the cabin the advantage of being secure from regularly-traveled trails. A large corral, built of oak pickets, stood in the rear; and the inevitable bake-oven and smoke-house were located between it and the cabin.

Everything connected with the ranch was within the bottom land; and care had been taken, in the felling of trees, not to make any noticeable break in the luxuriant growth which might catch the eye of marauding Indians or Mexican bandits, both of which were deadly foes to the Texan settlers everywhere between the Rio Frio and the Rio Grande.

Colonel Jack Wellington had established his ranch at this extreme point of the frontier much against the advice of his friends, who all urged him to locate on the Rio Medina, near the Alamo City.

There was no habitation within twenty miles of the Wellington Ranch; and, although there were some who called the old colonel foolish, and predicted that he would lose his scalp ere three months expired, others asserted that he could cut his way through any war-party or gang of outlaws, who might by accident discover his cabin. But even these last were forced to think him wanting in judgment, as well as utterly selfish, when, after he had become a fixture, and his stock had been purchased, he sent to Galveston for his adopted daughter—a beautiful girl of sixteen summers, who had been at school in that city.

Flora Wellington, upon her arrival at the ranch of her father—for so she always called the old colonel—was delighted with the home, which was indeed an earthly Paradise.

The old gentleman had spared no expense to make the rough cabin pleasant, having purchased fine furniture, including a piano and all the little *et ceteras* which go so far to fill up the feminine desires and longings.

However, Flora spent but a small part of her time in-doors, but went skipping hither and thither among the thousand and one varieties of brilliant flowers, herself the queen of all, and striving to imitate the songs of the birds that soon grew to know and love her.

She was never permitted, however, to stray far from the ranch, unless in company with her father, when the latter chose to inspect his herds of sleek, half-wild cattle.

Two Mexicans, named respectively Antonio and Augustine, were engaged to overlook, and prevent the herds from straying off the range, and to assist in marking and branding.

These men lived in a thatched hut, erected in the midst of a dense thicket near the corral, to the east of the cabin, and within the creek bottom.

Aunt Haldy, an old negress, and Picayune, her son, a bright boy of fourteen, constituted the remainder of the colonel's household—these being the only slaves he had reserved, upon selling out his plantation in Louisiana, some two years previous to the opening of our tale.

Haldy was cook and maid-of-all-work, and Picayune was body-servant to the colonel, although, since the advent of Miss Flora at the ranch, the young dandy had been more faithful in his attendance upon her, than upon his master.

Having thus described in outline the Wellington home and its surroundings, we will now proceed to fix our attention more particularly upon two of our characters, who will claim the interest and sympathy of all who follow this pen trail.

It was a balmy evening in November, that Col. Jack Wellington and his lovely daughter sat beneath the vine wreathed veranda of their frontier dwelling, enjoying the beautiful, moon-illuminated scene before them.

Opposite them was a natural opening, forming a lawn, and extending toward the stream for fifty yards; then toward a wall of deep, dark verdure, here and there relieved by long drooping festoons of gray Spanish moss; sometimes known, in this region, as "old man's beard."

The day-birds had fluttered into the thickets for the night, but the wood was filled with the sweet, flute-like notes of many mocking-birds; while myriads of insects gave out a continuous hum, broken now and then by the deep, harsh croak of a frog, or the hoot of an owl.

Bars of silvery moonlight darted through the trees into the dense shades, serving to make up a wild, weird scene, such as can be found only in sunny South-land.

"How very, very beautiful!"

The words seemed to be extorted from the young girl, as her eyes roved in admiration around the opening.

Flora was one who would claim the attention and homage even of her own sex, for she was indeed a lovely being; long ringlets of raven black hair hung, without control of comb or ribbon, over her perfect shoulders, to her waist. Her eyes were dark brown, with that in their limpid depths which spoke of guileless innocence, and deep, pure thoughts. The roseate bloom of health was upon her cheeks; and her small, even teeth gleamed out from between her lips, like pearls in a setting of rubies. Of medium height, graceful in every motion as the spotted fawns that sported in wild freedom upon the plain beyond her home—such was Flora Wellington, the heroine of our story.

"How very, very beautiful!"

As these words left the lips of the fair girl, the colonel arose from his seat, stepped down from the veranda, and, with his hands clasped behind him, began to pace back and forth on the sward in front of his daughter, as if in deep thought.

He was a tall, symmetrical, gray-haired man; straight as a forest pine, and, although full sixty years of age, had the step and air of a genuine soldier. His eye was yet undimmed, notwithstanding he had, in the war with Mexico, served from the bloody field of Palo Alto to the triumphant entry of the army of his country into the historic city of the Montezumas.

"I presume to say, my dear child," at length spoke the colonel, in a voice which showed that his thoughts were dwelling more upon some other subject, "I presume, by the manner in which your words were spoken, that they were addressed to yourself more than to me. I may remark, however, without flattery, that they apply to yourself."

Stopping in his walk, he looked down upon the girl, and added:

"Flora, you are very, very pretty, and I was an inconsiderate old fool—in fact, it was the basest selfishness—to bring you here to this wild region, away from civilization and from those of your own age and sex, simply because I was lonely without you."

"Papa, dear, pray do not speak in that way again!" exclaimed Flora, rising to her feet and joining him. "This is not the first time, and I have repeatedly forbidden it. Have I not assured you a hundred times that I am perfectly happy here with you? Have I not told you that I love every spray of grass, every leaf, and bird, and flower about our frontier

home? Why, papa, I tell you again, that the very logs of the corral are dear to me! I am supremely happy; for it is always summer here, and I dream a great part of my time, whether sleeping or waking. I beg of you never to think that you could cause me a greater degree of happiness by removing from this lovely spot."

"I believe you are speaking your mind truthfully, Flora, but I fear you have schooled yourself into being contented here out of consideration for me. But I, who know the world, its opinions, and what it expects, am conscious of doing you a great wrong by debarring you from enjoying the society of those who would be congenial to you. You have now been here nearly eight months, and during that time have not seen a dozen faces outside of our own household, and those have been rough scouts and Mexicans, and the Indian, Turtle, the Tonkaway. Have you never thought of the danger which surrounds us; and now more especially, when the Comanches and Apaches are reported as passing south of us, on the opposite side of the Frio?"

"I must confess," Flora admitted, "that there have been times when I have been apprehensive of danger; but, strange to say, I have not thought of the Indians molesting us. Probably because I have seen none, except the chief, Turtle, who is, I am positive, one of the noblest men, red or white, that ever breathed the air of the prairies."

"Then from what, or whom, have you apprehended danger, Flora? I cannot understand from what quarter it could possibly come except from the Llanos toward the west."

"You forget," was the answer, "that Cortina is ravaging the Rio Grande, and that El Negro Bravo, equally as blood-hirsty a bandit as the former, has committed many outrages between our ranch and San Antonio."

"Very true, was the reply," but I do not think Cortina will extend his raids to the Frio, and El Negro Bravo has but a small band, which will soon be broken up by the Rangers. What has led you to suppose or suspect that we are in danger from the Mexican bandits?"

"Do not laugh at me, papa; do not think me foolish. But I very much distrust a certain person who is in your employ." She lowered her voice as she spoke.

"What!" exclaimed the colonel, in surprise, putting his arm around his daughter as he spoke. Explain yourself, my dear! Who is the person whom you suspect?"

"Antonio!" replied the young girl, in a suppressed tone, and with a manner which indicated her suspicions, even at the present moment, for she glanced meaningfully around her, as though she feared that the man whom she had mentioned might be near at hand.

Had Flora Wellington looked quickly upward, on the instant her eyes would have indeed encountered the black glittering orbs of the very person whose name she had spoken; for his form lay extended upon the roof of the veranda, his head projecting over, and his face stamped with brutal passion at finding that his character had been truthfully read by his employer's daughter.

Luckily for Antonio, the evening breeze at this moment rustled the vines which grew densely along the edge of the veranda roof; otherwise the quick movements of his clinched hands, which he was unable to control, and the nervous twitching of his frame, caused by his intense emotions when he realized his deadly peril, would unquestionably have betrayed him.

"Antonio!" exclaimed the colonel, in some surprise.

"Yes, papa; I have often seen him lurking around among the timber like a spy, when no doubt you have thought him on the plain. He is a coward at heart, I am certain, and can have no object in acting, as he does, unless he is in the pay of other parties. I do wish you would be on your guard, papa. Can you not keep an eye on his movements, and satisfy yourself as to whether he is the faithful servant he ought to be?"

"I have great confidence in your judgment, my daughter; and, now that you have spoken of it, I will say that, at times I have distrusted Antonio's honesty. He has an evil eye, and will bear watching. He is, as you say, a coward, and it would be an easy matter for him to stab me in the dark if he chose to do so, and anything were to be gained by it, either to himself, or to those in whose employ he may possibly be."

CHAPTER II.

DISTRESSING FAMILY SECRETS.

"Do you know, papa, that I am no longer sweet sixteen? This is my birthday. Seventeen to-day! I am getting to be quite an old woman." And Flora Wellington ran up laughingly to the colonel, as he stood on the lawn.

Much to her surprise and pain, her words seemed to deepen the looks of care which, latterly, had begun to settle upon his face. He seated himself upon the veranda, and, by a gesture, invited Flora to take a chair by his side. Pressing his hand upon his brow for an instant, Colonel Wellington cleared his throat, and, looking at the girl affectionately, thus spoke—

"My dear child, I am glad you informed me that this is your birthday. Strange that I should not have thought of it, myself, but I am growing old and forgetful. Listen to me for I have that to tell you which you should know for your future welfare; in fact, it is my duty to inform you, on this your birthday, of much, which, for obvious reasons, I have withheld from you. I may die at any time, and leave you without a protector. Do not interrupt me, Flora. It is getting late, and I would, with as few words as possible, relate a long story. I have often spoken to you of your mother, but I have never told you that she was very dear to me. You are very like her, my child. I loved her as a true man loves only once in his life. I have never married, for I could not love another as I loved her.

With a powerful effort at self-control, the colonel continued:

"When she and your father were married, she believed me to be dead. I had been rambling in the Old World, and my letters to her had been intercepted by the man who had reason to fear me as a rival, although by what means he secured the letters has ever been a mystery to me, as he was not allowed to visit your grandfather's house. I would spare your feelings, Flora, though I might tell many bitter things. Your father was not worthy of your mother. He poisoned her young mind, and induced her to become his wife without the consent of her father. When I returned from Europe, I was made wretched by the discovery that the woman whom I loved had linked her life with one who was far beneath her in fortune, education, and character. At that time I left New York, where your grandfather then resided, and, with the money that had been left me by a wealthy relative, I purchased the plantation in Louisiana, which we left two years ago.

"I had been there scarcely a year, when, much to my surprise, I received a letter from your mother, whose whereabouts had not been known since her unlucky marriage. It was postmarked, New Orleans; and, as you may suppose, I hastened to that city, with all dispatch, as the letter requested me. I found her in a wretched lodging-house, and at the point of death. It was but too evident that she had been in actual want, and might have been saved from suffering and death, had she but written me sooner. Your father had been killed in a duel, after having squandered the little money that he had, at the gaming-table; and your poor mother had humbled herself to write these facts to your grandfather, and implore his aid; but the letter was returned unopened. Then it was that she learned my address.

"I had your mother and yourself—you were but two years old—removed to a respectable dwelling, and secured the best medical advice; but without avail. She died, blessing me, and, with her last strength, placed you in my arms, I assuring her that I would love and care for you as long as God gave me life."

During this painful recital, Flora lay in the colonel's arms, striving in vain to control her grief; but he himself was so filled with emotion that he did not realize the pain he was giving his darling.

"And now," he continued, "comes the strangest portion of my story. It was told me by your mother on her death-bed. There was another child—a little boy, three years older than yourself—and your poor mother's life was made brighter by his presence for two years, when a sad and heart-rending event occurred. Your father had the misfortune—I will call it by its right name—of winning a large sum of money from a stranger, on one of the river boats which ply between New Or-

leans and St. Louis. The man professed to believe that his money had been won unfairly, and swore he would get even with your father. By bribing the nurse who had the care of your baby brother, he succeeded in stealing the child, and carrying it away. Every means was used to discover the abductor, but his name and residence were never ascertained. I promised your mother that I would do all in my power to trace her son up; in fact, the one great object of my life since she died, has been to bring you two orphans together—to see the children of her whom I so loved restored to each other. Now you can understand, my dear Flora, what has caused my thoughts to wander many a time, in an absent, troubled manner."

"Papa Wellington," said the young girl, striving to conceal the pain and grief that she felt, "you have been carrying a weary load all these years, but God will reward you. Your words have given me both pain and pleasure. Pleasure to know that I have had a brother—that I still may have one. Pain to know that, from his infancy, he has been a stranger to the love of his kindred. Heaven grant that I may yet meet him!"

As she breathed this prayer the colonel's self-control gave way for a moment, but he soon continued:

"This narrative of past events, connected with your family history, it is necessary that you should know; but it has been a painful task for me to perform. Not only has my search for your brother been a fruitless one, but I doubt very much if he is now alive. However, I will not distress you further."

"Tell me all! Tell me everything!" she pleaded.

"Yes, my darling; harrowing to my own feelings though it be, I will relate to you all that I know. Thank Heaven! The worst is already told! You know that I have done what I could in carrying out your mother's last wishes in regard to you, but you do not know, that I am now, in comparison to what I have been, poor in this world's goods. This is the reason that I came to this wild frontier. Knowing that what I shall have to bequeath you at my death will amount to but little, I have taken steps to ascertain if you cannot secure the estate which, by right of birth, belongs to you. I have learned that your grandfather, after the marriage of your mother, himself married again. His second wife was a widow, who had one son by her previous marriage. This son, Jack Dawson, was, it appears, a most hardened and reckless villain, for he made an attempt to poison your grandfather, after having forged his name for a large amount. James Carrolton, your grandfather, was a wealthy New York broker, who had in his employ several clerks. One of these, Clarence Carter, had the entire charge of his business, and when Jack Dawson forged his step-father's name, he left proofs in the desk of Clarence which would point to him as the guilty party. Clarence Carter was arrested, but, thanks to able counsel, retained by his employer, who had implicit confidence in him, he was acquitted. Detectives were set to work up the case, and the result was the arrest and conviction of Dawson, who was sent to Sing Sing for a term of ten years.

"I have also learned a singular fact in connection with it. Your grandfather adopted Clarence Carter, whose name was changed to Carrolton, and at the death of the old gentleman, Clarence found himself a millionaire. It is a strange thing, passing strange in these days of rascality, but since coming into possession, he has been leaving no stone unturned to discover to whom, in equity, the estate belongs. He is now acquainted with the fact that Miss Flora Wellington is the only blood relation of James Carrolton known to be living, and that she is the true and rightful heir to that vast property. This has been a great surprise to me, Flora, as it must be to you; and you will be astonished when I tell you that this very Quixotic young man is coming to Texas to find my little wild-flower of the prairie, and deliver up to her the untold thousands which he could keep, were he so disposed.

"I trust he will reach here in safety, and that Miss Flora Wellington will say to so honorable a gentleman, when he does arrive, 'Mr. Carrolton, will you please take charge of my gold, and of myself also?'"

During the latter part of the colonel's recital he had brightened up wonderfully, and, as he

closed his remarks, he clasped Flora in his arms, and danced with her across the lawn, causing the Mexican spy, in his old lair upon the roof, to hide his villainous head among the vines.

"When is this very chivalrous knight of the quill coming, papa?" inquired Flora, when she at last found herself firmly on her feet.

Again was the head of Antonio thrust outward, his ear downward to catch what might be spoken.

"He left New York a month ago," answered the colonel, "but, as he took passage in a sailing vessel, it is impossible to say when he will arrive at San Antonio, for he will be forced to travel from Matagorda in a wagon-train. Now, my dear, what do you think of your prospects? Did I not do right in leaving the brightest and most encouraging part of my story until the last?"

"I shall not bother my head with any thoughts in regard to what you think are such very flattering prospects. Papa, I want to remain here at the ranch, and to devote my time, for the present, writing to the chiefs of police in every city of the Union. I am not going to allow you to die. I am resolved to trace up my brother; and I do not want my grandfather's gold, or—his clerk!"

"Wait until you have seen him, my dear," said the colonel, with a satisfied smile. "You will be ready, I have no doubt, to fall in love with him at first sight, for you are predisposed in his favor, knowing his noble character, and his praiseworthy object in thus venturing to these far-away, barbarous regions, for the purpose of surrendering to you a princely fortune. But kiss me good-night, and then to pleasant dreams, for I know you are sleepy, and I have been wrong to detain you so long."

So saying, Colonel Wellington and his lovely daughter passed into the cabin, and, fifteen minutes later, when all was quiet about the ranch, Antonio, the evil-eyed, slid lightly down one of the veranda posts.

Hastening to the corral, the treacherous villain hurriedly equipped a strong, half-breed horse, sprung into the saddle, and urged the animal on rapidly through the bushes, and to the creek bottom.

Spurring into the thicket in which his hut was located, Antonio, in a few words, instructed his comrade, Augustine, to inform the old ranchero that he had gone to attend to some mustang snares, besides giving other directions in a lower tone of voice, and accompanied by violent and vengeful gestures in the direction of the cabin. Evidently the serpent was alarmed.

Stopping but a moment, he growled an *adios*, waved his sombrero, and then, spurring his horse into a gallop, forded the creek and sped over the prairie toward the Rio Medina and San Antonio.

The Alamo, the Thermopylae of America, was at the time of which we speak, leased by the Federal Government. This vast Mission now served to stable mules, which were used for the transportation of supplies to the frontier posts.

The Menger House, the principal hotel in Western Texas, was, and yet is, on the same side of the Alamo Plaza as the old Mission; and between the two buildings was Phil Immeke's boarding-house and beer saloon—a place which was much frequented by the Government employees.

From the veranda of Immeke's saloon, now called the Alamo Hotel, one could step inside the bar, and, if a person desired it, by entering the bar and passing through the first door to his left, he could seat himself in a card room which overlooks the Alamo Plaza, but which was generally deserted during the hours which were popularly supposed to be devoted to business at the Government head quarters.

CHAPTER III.

BLACK BEN.

It was three days since the evening on which Colonel Wellington and his daughter Flora had conversed upon the important subjects which are recorded in the preceding chapters. A new arrival was seated near one of the open windows in Immeke's card-room, and gazing out on the busy Plaza.

This person was a short, thick-set, villainous-looking fellow, with black, piercing eyes that glared and glittered beneath his overhanging brows, like the eyes of a maddened snake that was coiled for a deadly spring.

He had a wandering, restless glance, and a nervous manner that would have attracted the attention of any observer, and cause one to think that he was continually striving to evade notice. In short, he had the air of a "jail-bird."

His face was almost entirely concealed by a heavy black beard, his complexion was very dark; and he was dressed in the flashy style which would indicate that he was a gambling-house hanger on, or a card-sharp.

His nervous movements, however, and his evident fondness for liquor, which last was betrayed by the "toddy-blossoms" on his nose, showed plainly that he was not one who would be permitted to handle the cards, or rake the stakes in a game of any importance; unless, indeed, he owned the bank himself, and then his chances would be a short game and a "clean table."

The man who dealt monte or faro in San Antonio was obliged to have a firm hand, eye, and nerve; it being necessary for him, at times, to use his revolver and knife with as much quickness and dexterity as the cards.

The person we have described had arrived in San Antonio a year previous to the opening of our story, and had registered at the Braden House as Ben Blake; but it was not long ere his looks and questionable character had gained for him the cognomen of "Black Ben," and from that day to the present he had been known by no other name. His frequent absences from the Alamo City, and his lavish expenditures of money, had led many law-abiding citizens to ask each other, in a confidential way, what the business was that Black Ben followed; these remarks being made in a manner that seemed to imply that the speakers doubted the honesty of the man.

The movements of Black Ben, however, were so secret, his goings out and comings in were so sudden and unexpected, that no proofs could ever be found against him. Notwithstanding this, the Vigilance Committee had, for some time past, his name down on their books as a decidedly suspicious character.

Black Ben had sat for some length of time gazing out upon the Plaza, as if in deep thought; then suddenly thrusting his hand into a side pocket, he drew out a letter, opened it, and seemed to be perusing it with deep interest.

The letter was directed to "Ben Blake, Esq., San Antonio, Texas," and was dated at New Orleans, Nov. 5th, 1859.

It read as follows:

"DEAR SIR:

"Your epistle is at hand, and contents duly noted and appreciated. You say that you have seen such a mark, in India ink, upon the right arm of a drunken man in San Antonio; and also, that the man has no knowledge of his parents, or of his birthplace. You can rest assured that he is the lost child, and one of the two heirs to the estate in question. Such a complicated and singular mark would not be on the person of any one unless by design; this you must admit. You ask if the party now in possession of the estate can be ousted. I answer, most undoubtedly; that is, if the children of the disinherited daughter are alive, and can be brought forward. As I have been in the employ of other, and interested parties in this case, you will at once see that I do not wish to be known in it in connection with yourself, and should not have given you the information you desired, but for the very liberal fee inclosed in your last favor. With thanks for same,

"I am, yours truly,

"THISTLE DOWN."

Black Ben refolded his letter, and carefully replaced it in his pocket, with a smile of the most intense satisfaction upon his face, and muttering:

"That clinches the business! I know now that I am on the right trail, thanks to my highly intellectual discernment and perspicuous brain, at the time I wrote to the detective, in sending him a fifty-spot. I have had some qualms of conscience in this case, which have caused a surprise party in my brain, for I never knew that I had any heart, or justice, or integrity, in my make-up. I know that the fellow is poor, and broken down by drink besides. He has had a hard row to hoe through life; but he stands in my way for all that, and I will give him cause to curse the day that he was born. If his past has been a dark one, I'll make his future as black as Hades! I'll make him look upon himself with such horrible loathing and contempt, that he'll blow his own brains out, and save me the trouble. Yes, by the gods! I'll make him a tool to effect the destruction of his own sister, although the poor *diablo* does not know that he has a relation in the world! By St. Iago! His doom is sealed from this day!" And Black Ben brought his hand down upon the arm of

his chair with a hard slap, by way of emphasizing his pious remarks.

At this instant, unseen by Black Ben, a man entered the bar from the Plaza; and, leaning against the door-jamb, stole a cautious look within the card-room. The new-comer was a young man, in seedy, thread-bare garments, although showing something still of former respectability in cut and fashion. He had a dissipated look, his hair being disordered, while his hat was drawn down in a decidedly slouchy manner over his face.

No sooner did he perceive who it was that sat by the window, than he growled out in a deep, hoarse tone:

"How-dy, Ben?"

The person thus addressed sprung up so quickly at the sudden, gruff, and unexpected salutation, that he nearly fell to the floor. This comical move, with his nervous look of alarm, so pleased the seedy individual that he became almost convulsed with laughter, and his red face glistened, as if it had recently received a coat of varnish.

The affrighted look of Black Ben disappeared, however, as soon as he recognized the man who stood before him—changing, first, to a glance of stern rebuke, and then, to one of relief and pleasure.

"May I never flip another card or tip a crystal, if I didn't frighten you, Ben!" exclaimed the new-comer, after his fit of laughter had subsided. "It's your 'set-'em-up,' this trip, and I think I need a drink about as bad as you do. Ben, your nerves are getting as weak as mine. Did you lay in an extra supply of 'bug-juice' last night, after losing that big bet of yours on the seven against the queen? Hope you salted down a 'slug' for lubricating purposes."

"Have you got through, Monte Mose?"

Ben asked this question as he quietly re-seated himself, and appeared to relapse into a deep study. He clasped his hands about his forehead, while his elbows rested upon his knees. A look of surprise spread over the face of the man who had been addressed as 'Monte Mose,' as he muttered:

"Worse than I expected! Hanged if it ain't. Reckon he's got the jim-jams comin' on this time."

Monte Mose seemed to hesitate for a moment, and remained silent. Then he approached the window. Of a sudden, Black Ben sprung up, grasped the chair upon which he had been seated, and dashed it to the floor, exclaiming in a loud voice:

"I'll make a play this very day, by St. Iago!"

Mose sprung back at the sudden, noisy, and, as he thought, threatening movement of Black Ben; but, as he caught the expression on the face of the latter, his surprise and alarm vanished, and he said, with something between a sneer and a laugh:

"Glad to hear it, Ben. It's about time, any way. I declare, I'm as dry as a contribution-box."

The eyes of the two men met for an instant, when both burst into a roar of laughter; and Ben, first slapping Mose on the shoulder, then locked arms with him familiarly, and the two walked into the bar-room, Mose marching with impatient, eager steps.

"Two whiskies, straight!" ordered Black Ben.

With hands that were anything but steady, the precious pair poured out the fiery liquor until their glasses were nearly full, then tipped tumblers and swallowed the burning beverage without diluting it.

"Just what I needed the very worst sort, Ben," said Monte Mose, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, as he brought down his fist upon the bar with a sounding blow. "Bet your bottom dollar I'll feel like an English lord and more so, inside of fifteen minutes. I tell you just what it is, Ben, I was blue, when I came in, from my scalp to my boots."

"Set that decanter out again, do you hear?" ordered Black Ben, as he threw a doubloon with a loud ring upon the bar. "Monte Mose, I want to drive the shakes all out of you, and get clear of them myself at the same time. So suppose you begin by putting yourself outside of about four fingers more of forty-rod lightning at short notice."

"You needn't waste any more loose English, Ben, in trying to entice another drink down my throat. Not the least need of it. Here she goes!"

Smacking his lips, the festive Mose wiped

them off with his sleeve, begged a chew of fine-cut from the barkeeper, and then turned with a satisfied, but still puzzled look toward Black Ben, saying:

"It's not often that I strike a double-barreled treat, old boy, and I'm glad I fell in with you when I did."

"So am I," returned Ben. "But come back into the card-room, won't you? I want to talk with you!"

Still further mystified, and forced to think, by the unusual friendly manner and liberality toward him in particular, that Black Ben was a little "off his center," Mose followed on with a quick step, and fairly boiling over with curiosity as to what might be coming next. He was soon to find out.

"Sit down, Mose," said Ben; and as the young man obeyed, he continued: "By the way, Monte Mose, how, in the name of wonder, did you ever come to have such a handle hitched onto you?"

"I might ask you how you came to be called Black Ben," returned Mose; answering the question by asking another. "I presume, though, that it was in the usual Texas way, from some peculiarity. You have black hair and whiskers, and you're not the lightest complexioned man in the world."

Black winced a trifle at this rather close cut; although, as he turned suddenly, he knew by the manner of Mose that the latter intended no unpleasant insinuations against his character.

"Well, Ben," continued Mose, as he drew up his chair, "I don't mind telling you that I got the name I am now mostly known by, from frequenting the Bull's Head. I've hung around the monte tables so much within the past year that I have become a regular fixture there; and the boys have got so that they can't deal straight unless they know that I'm at my post, ready to drink whether the bank is losing or winning. That's about how it is, Ben." Here Mose became a little excited. "A year ago," he said, "I was a respectable member of society, and held a good position in the Quartermaster's Department, over at the Alamo. What my name was then, many of the boys know; but they do not address me as Moses Morse, as they did in those days. But that does not trouble me in the least. I care very little now what they do call me, if they only sling in a drink now and then. Besides, I don't even know that I have any right to the name, as the man who first gave it to me was certainly not my father. I have been brought down, or rather I have slid down to my present degraded condition, by a love for strong drink; rather, perhaps, I ought to say for the excitement occasioned by it. There is no use in struggling against it. I cannot conquer my appetite, though I have a pretty strong will in all other respects. I have so debased myself, as to do odd jobs about a bar-room for the whisky that was necessary to keep me from the horrors of delirium tremens; and to-day, when I first came into this room, I was about as desperate a man as there is in the Lone Star State. I feel at times as if every man's hand was against me; and I almost believe that I would commit crime, rather than suffer, as I have done, the fearful cravings for strong drink!"

"I know how you feel Mose," said his companion, with a show of sympathy; "I've been all along there myself. But as smart a fellow as you are need never want for money sufficient to buy all the whisky he may want to drink. How would you like, Mose, to make a stake of about—well, I'll say a thousand?"

"For a far less sum than that, Ben, you can set me down on the anxious seat," answered Mose, more and more astonished at the words of the man before him—a man who had never shown, or permitted the slightest degree of familiarity.

With an air of the utmost indifference, Black Ben sat stroking his whiskers, while his eyes wandered hither and thither over the groups of people on the Plaza. Then, turning abruptly, he arose from his seat, and stepping up close to his companion, he asked in a low, meaning voice:

"Mose, would you run the chances of getting your heart split, or having a ball sent through your brain, for the amount I have named?"

Black Ben had chosen the very best time to ask the question; for the liquor had drowned all the better nature and the finer feelings in the heart of Monte Mose, causing him to be more like a lunatic than a sane man. He was,

in short, in such a state of excitement that he was ready to do almost any deed of blood, which, in his sober moments, would have caused him to shudder with horror at the bare thought of. Such a state of feeling, however was only flitting and momentary, and caused by circumstances and surroundings which were subject to sudden change; and Black Ben was well aware of this, for he had studied Mose when the latter was unconscious of being honored by his notice.

"I believe I would, Ben," was the slow answer of Mose, given in a meditative manner, which suddenly changed. Then, with his teeth grating, and with a look of desperation in his eyes—"I believe I would, if it was a job of yours. I can face the mouth of Hades, and brave his infernal majesty, if I am kept well primed; but as soon as the effect of the liquor is gone, I'm the meanest and most skulking coward of a cur in the Alamo City."

As Monte Mose ceased speaking, he sprung up from his chair, tore his hat from his head, and ran his fingers through his long curling hair, showing a high, broad, intellectual brow and a face which, were it not marred by poisonous eruptions, would have been called an exceedingly handsome one.

"Look at me, Ben!" he said. "Young as I am, I have filled high positions, positions of trust. I have been dressed like a gentleman—I was a gentleman! And now what am I? I will tell you," he went on, as he shook his clinched fist in the air; "I am a bar-room loafer, a gambling-house bummer; despised by every one—even by those who have made me what I am! Could I sink any lower? No! Show me a chance to make the sum you mention, and I'll strive for it at the risk of my life without asking any questions. Bah! What does a life like mine amount to? I am no use to myself or to any one else. Tell me your plans, Ben; I'm your man for a thousand dollars, even if the work should be a desperate attempt to Americanize the so-called Republic of Mexico. I'm your man to the death!"

"Good for you Mose," said Ben, as he passed a cigar. "I believe you mean business, and, to show you that I am in the same box, I will so far make a confidant of you as to, in a measure, place my life and liberty in your hands. I have not the slightest fear that you will betray me; and, a few days hence, you will have no inclination to do so—not the very slightest—if such a thought should now be lurking in your mind. But I believe you will act on the square."

"Hush up that sort of gab, Ben!" spoke up Mose, quickly, in an offended tone. "I want to hear no doubts as to my doing the square thing by any one that I associate with, for it riles me up to a fighting pitch to listen to it."

"Good for you, Mose! I'll give you a dose of fighting in a few days, if you are spoiling for it; but you needn't begin to practice on me. To set all jokes aside, however, I want you to procure at once a good fit-out of arms and clothing, and a horse, with all the proper equipments. Your rig must be suitable for either plaza or plain. Here are two hundred dollars. If you want more, you can call on me. I shall expect you to report for duty within ten hours, or sooner if you can."

"By thunder, Ben," burst from the lips of Mose, in utter surprise, as he felt the roll of golden eagles within his palm. "This is business, from the word go! You are the kind of a pard I've been in search of, but have never been able to find."

"Now, Mose," said Black Ben, without taking notice of his companion's amazement; "I will prove to you, in another way that I intend to stick to you as a pard through thick and thin. I know that you will not go back on me, even if you do get boiling over with whisky, which, by the way, I hope you won't do, at least for the present."

Although this was a lie, for he knew and hoped that Mose would get to drinking heavily, Ben spoke the last words with an air of utmost sincerity.

"Bet your life I won't go back on you or get full of bug-juice either. I'm not so mean as that."

"Just step to the door, and see if there are any loafers in the bar," requested Ben, smiling at the extravagant words and actions of Monte Mose.

"The coast is clear," reported the latter, after inspecting the bar-room. The bar-keeper

is on the snooze—filled up with beer—so go ahead!"

Seating himself again, Mose bent forward, and in a low voice, Black Ben proceeded to explain.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFIDENTIAL CONFESSION.

"You see, Mose," began Black Ben, "I came from a slam-up family in York State. My mother married a rich old coon for her second husband, who propelled me out from under the shade of the paternal tree in rather an abrupt manner. There is no need to tell you that I have been a rough sort of a chap, for you must have decided that in your own mind. But, to enter into my family history without wasting any more words, I will say that a certain man is rolling in wealth which, by right, belongs to me and to my mother; but which he holds by law. This man, not only enjoys the wealth and social position that should be mine, but he was the direct cause of my being disgraced, and turned out into the cold world in my youth; banished from society and ignored by my friends. What would you do to a man who had thus disgraced you, made you a drunkard and a gambler, and forced you at times to beg the paltriest favors from strangers?"

"By the God of justice!" exclaimed Monte Mose, with glittering eyes, and bringing his fist down heavily upon the window-sill; "I would be tempted to—kill him!"

"That's me, every time, Mose," agreed Ben; "and what is more, I have sworn to do so the first chance that I get. This man," continued he, leaning nearer to his new pard, "this man, who has so wronged me, is coming to Texas in a short time. I have reliable information to that effect; and his object is to marry a young lady who is very dear to me, not satisfied with having hurled me down to ruin and disgrace. Now, you may understand how intense is my hatred toward him; and how necessary it is for my future welfare and peace of mind, that he does not have the opportunity he seeks, of meeting the young lady I have mentioned!"

"Yes, Ben; just so. I begin to see through the mist a little, and I'll help you out, old boy!"

"When I tell you that the property which is held by this man," resumed Black Ben, "and which is mine by right, will come into my hands if I marry this lady, you will more clearly comprehend my motives in asking your assistance, in not only aiding me in ridding the earth of such a villain, but of helping me to win as beautiful a girl as ever left her dainty foot-prints on plaza or plain."

"I'm getting more and more interested," said Mose, as he paced back and forth, and rattled the gold in his pocket with evident satisfaction. "Especially since you mentioned the young lady. May I ask if she favors your suit?"

"I might as well own up," answered Ben, "that not only is she unaware of my wish to marry her, but that she does not even know me. I have met her a few times, but always in company, for the express purpose of studying her character. I have never spoken a dozen words to her, and I have no hopes whatever of being able to gain her for my wife by any sort of fair means."

A deep scowl formed on the brow of Monte Mose at these words; but his back was toward Black Ben, and the latter did not notice the evident and plainly-marked displeasure on the face of the young man whom he had been buying, and which would no doubt have been expressed in words, had not an event occurred which at once seemed to change the whole current of his thoughts.

Before Mose had turned, Black Ben sprung to the window and uttered a cry of surprise and pleasure.

"What's up?" demanded Mose, with a start of sudden alarm, his nerves being in such a state that he was easily excited.

"Hold on a minute," was the reply, "and you'll see. I think that I'll have good news bearing on the case in hand. Do you see that Mexican galloping across the Plaza?"

"Yes, I see him; and a tough-looking customer he is. I shouldn't care to meet him on a lone trail unless I was well armed, and I'd want the best sort to keep the drop on him at that."

"Mose, you are mistaken in that man's character. He is a pard of mine, and you'll

like him when you become acquainted with him, as you will if you go with me, as we have proposed. Ah! here he comes."

The Mexican who had attracted the attention of Black Ben dismounted, threw his lariat over a post, and came walking into the bar-room with a brisk step.

"I thought it was you, Antonio," said Ben, as he met the Greaser at the door of the card-room and grasped his hand, at the same time giving him a secret sign.

"What news at Victoria? Have you heard anything further in regard to the man who is expected from New York?"

Black Ben emphasized the words Victoria and man, and this was a sufficient hint to the Mexican to be somewhat guarded in his report, although Mose at the time did not notice anything peculiar in his remark.

Rattling off his questions quickly, Ben continued: "Here is a friend of mine. Mose, allow me to make you acquainted with Antonio, a prairie pard. Perhaps you know that I sometimes take a hunt in the bush and on the plains."

Mose and the Mexican tipped sombreros, the former gazing with curiosity, not unmixed with distrust, into the black, snake-like eyes of the Greaser, who avoided his look, and turned to Black Ben as he replied to his interrogations.

"The senorita is at the ranch, and well. The man from New York should be, by this time, in San Antonio. It does not take a ship a whole month to reach Matagorda."

"By St. Iago, Antonio, you are a brick!"

So exclaimed Ben as he threw his hat across the room and then hastened into the bar, returning with a bottle and three glasses, which latter he poured full to the brim.

"Drink, Mose! Drink, Antonio! The game has opened much sooner than I had expected, and with the luck on my side of the table. Here's health and happiness to my future wife, and death, soon and certain, to the Man from New York!"

But Mose did not drink. He set his tumbler back upon the bar, which, being noticed by Black Ben, he exclaimed, in astonishment, and in an offended tone of voice:

"What's the matter, pard? I never heard of such a thing as your leaving a drop of whisky in your glass before."

"I can't drink any more just now, Ben; besides, the business in hand, I should judge, requires a cool brain, and I don't intend to make a hog of myself."

"Shake!" returned Ben. "Good boy! I see you understand matters, and are starting square on the trail." Then, turning toward Antonio, he added: "Do you know if any wagon-train has arrived from Matagorda today?"

"Big mule-train on the Plaza now," answered Antonio. "Just come in, they said, from Powder-horn."

"Good!" said Ben, joyfully. "Who knows but what our chicken is on it? He'll wish he had waited until his spurs grew before he came to Texas, or my name is not Ben Blake! Come, boys, we'll take a turn over to the Menger, and see if we can sight our game. Hold on, though! I reckon, Mose, you had better get your fitout purchased, as I shall perhaps need you sooner than I had expected. Antonio and I will see in regard to the new arrival, and you can meet me at eleven o'clock at—" Ben whispered the remainder of the sentence in the ear of Mose, and the latter walked out from the bar, and soon was lost in the crowd, while Black Ben and the Mexican sauntered carelessly into the office of the Menger House.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN FROM NEW YORK.

SAN ANTONIO was the great outfitting depot at this time for the vast frontier region that extended in a crescent shape from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the Red River, at the point where it forms the boundary line between Texas and the Indian nation.

The immense amount of supplies was first brought by ox or mule trains from Matagorda Bay to the Alamo City, all the transportation through the extensive frontier we have mentioned, being done by these conveyances.

Large numbers of Government wagons were used to transport supplies of every description to the forts, camps and stations, while citizen trains without number, of from twenty to a hundred prairie schooners, were continually winding their way over the wide plains, both

south to Mexico, and westerly to El Paso, Santa Fe and the remote settlements around the frontier military posts.

This method of transportation necessitated the employment of a vast army of herders and teamsters, bold, hardy men, who, as it were, held their lives in their hands, being ready to face death at any moment, as the war-whoop of the red-man and the yell of the Mexican bandit were seldom out of their ears.

San Antonio, the largest city in Western Texas, was composed of people from nearly every nation under Heaven, Americans, Germans and Mexicans predominating, and it literally swarmed with gamblers, outlaws and desperadoes of all degrees, who had left their native places suddenly and in secret. Not a day or a night passed without scenes of bloodshed in the streets, plazas, saloons and fandangoes of the Alamo City.

About the time that Black Ben and Monte Mose began their confidential chat in the card-room of Immeke's, a train of twenty mule wagons rumbled into the Alamo Plaza, and, one by one, unloaded at the main entrance of the old Mission, showing that they carried Government stores.

In the rear of this train was a small r wagon, drawn by four mules, and by the side of which was a young man mounted upon a strongly-built half-breed nag.

The driver of this wagon was a comical looking Irishman, who was evidently out of his element, as he managed the mule very awkwardly, and kept up a round of yells, swinging his whip on all sides, much to the amusement of the motley crowd of lookers on.

With some difficulty, this son of the Emerald Isle managed, by leading and driving the animals, to gain a position in front, and near the main entrance to the Menger House, where he halted; the mules showing by their fagged appearance that the trip had been a long one, through heat and on a hard and dusty trail.

The young man, however, who seemed to be the owner of this equipage, showed no signs of fatigue; but sprung lightly from his horse, passed the bridle to an attentive colored porter and, with rapid movements, mounted the steps and entered the office of the hotel. He did not appear to be more than two and twenty years of age, was about five feet, seven inches in height, and compactly built. He was noticeably agile and graceful in his movements; which, with his splendid physique, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, indicated a long and systematic gymnastic practice. His eyes were dark blue, and seemed to take in at a glance everything around him. His hair was dark brown and wavy, while his features were regular, and in fact handsome, for the rosy tint of perfect health was upon his cheeks.

Take him for all in all, a physiognomist would say at a glance that there was a man whom one could trust in any emergency—a man who would stand by a friend until death; in short, a noble, honest, true-hearted gentleman.

Walking up to the desk, the new arrival registered his name, and expressed a desire to go at once to his room. He then stepped briskly to the door, and in a cheery voice gave some directions to the Irishman and porters in regard to the removal of several trunks from the wagon to the baggage-room of the hotel. With parting instructions to the clerk, as to the stabling of his horse and team, he passed up the staircase in the wake of a negro boy, who had been waiting to show him to his room.

In twenty minutes more the young man had descended the stairs, in a neat-fitting costume, and crossing the court-yard, entered the dining room.

At this moment Black Ben and Antonio entered the hotel. Approaching the register, the former rested his finger upon the name of the last arrival, while his eyes glittered with ill-concealed delight, as he read in a low tone:

"Clarence Carrolton, New York!"

"Antonio," he said, with a fiendish grin of exultation, "your cards did not play you false at Wellington Ranch. Long and patient waiting has at last brought him into my clutches!"

The entrance of the clerk from the bar, now put an end to the conversation between the two plotters; and, in a nonchalant manner, Black Ben turned from the desk.

"Come, Antonio," he said, "let's take a cigar!"

The pair sauntered into the bar, each selected

a weed, and standing on the opposite of the room from the entrance, waited to get a glimpse of "the Man from New York."

"We'll wait here for him," said Ben. "I want you to know your man, for we may wish to wipe him out this very night. We'll see what lay he is on here in town, and then decide upon what we have to do."

"Will Senor Carrolton not know El Negro Bravo?"

"Sish!" burst from the lips of Black Ben, as he gave the Mexican a punch in the ribs. Then he muttered, fiercely:

"Do you not remember that I told you never to breathe that name in this town? Do you want me to be hanged like a dog on the Plaza? By St. Iago! you are losing your senses."

"Caspita!" growled the Greaser, in vexation. "I forgot, senor. I will cut my tongue out if it speaks that name again!"

"Well, I hope you will control your tongue hereafter," said Ben; "and to answer your question I will state that my own mother would not know me. I have grown a heavy beard since he saw me; and gazing through iron bars has put my eyes out of joint somewhat. Antonio, what would you do to a man who had sworn you in behind stone walls, even supposing that you had deserved it?"

The Mexican drew his fingers, in a significant manner, across his throat, his face drawn into a murderous scowl.

"That's me, every time," agreed Ben, as he blew a cloud of smoke through his thick mustache. "This Carrolton has done me more injury than a dozen lives would pay for; and now he intends to marry the Senorita of Wellington Ranch."

"If Senor Ben says it, he will never look upon the waters of the Rio Frio," the Mexican assured.

"Don't be hasty, Antonio. Keep cool. All depends upon sly movements; for if we rush things we must take care that there are no grounds for leading people to suspect who it was that committed the deed. There are some people in this burg who would like well enough to stretch a rope with Black Ben on the end of it. I have had you at the ranch watching for news for some months, and it has come at last. When we get rid of Carrolton, I intend to abduct Miss Flora and force her to marry me; but first I wish to learn how the fellow has fixed affairs in regard to the estate. If I thought that he had things regulated in such a manner as would insure the property of the girl without any fuss or flurry, I'd put a ball through his brain before he got a chance to see her. If he has valuable papers with him, all right. We must get possession of the documents. When I point him out to you, I want you to shadow him, and let me know every move that he makes. He may make acquaintances here in town who might cause us trouble if he disappeared suddenly."

"Senor Ben can rest easy. My eyes are sharp, and Senor Carrolton shall speak to no man any length of time, without his words falling into my ears."

"I'll risk you with all the spying business, Antonio. By the way, you do not intend to return to the ranch, do you?"

"No. The senor and the senorita are too suspicious. The old man might see fit to try his rifle on me; but I must send Lopez to-night to tell Augustine he may expect that the Chaparral Cocks will crow on the Frio before many nights have passed."

"I am glad you have thought of that, for much depends upon Augustine if we do not succeed in corraling our game in San Antonio. Tell all the boys who are here in town to leave immediately for our old rendezvous."

"I see that Senor Ben has picked up a new friend. What does he intend to make out of Monte Mose?"

"Oh, I forgot to whisper a word in your ear, pard, in regard to Mose. He is a man that has got to be placed in such a position that he will not dare show his face in this city again. He might some day stand in my way—that is, should he find out his parentage; and I shall make him join our gang by fair or foul means. He will probably get drunk, and not know what he is about until it is too late for him to think of getting out of it."

"Senor Ben is a smart man. He understands how to get his enemies off the trail."

"Yes, Antonio; I flatter myself that I have a few brains, and I intend to use them for the benefit of the band, as well as my own. The

boys must have a chance to drive old Wellington's over the river; and you can boss the crowd, besides fingering the doubloons."

"Buena! Viva El—!"

"Hold!" cried Black Ben. "You came pretty near that time having to cut your own tongue out, as you threatened."

At this instant, the young man, Carrolton, came from the dining-room, across the court, and into the bar.

Antonio, who was on the alert, nudged his companion, and interrupting his angry remark, hissed in his ear:

"The Man from New York!"

"By all the gods, you must be right, my boy; although you assert it by guess-work, for you don't know him from Adam's off ox. Yes, it is he; but I am astonished. Did I not know he was here, I should never have recognized him. By the look of his eye he has his own share of assurance, and 'sand' enough to back it up. He is a doomed man, for all that. I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath. I am playing now for a big stake, and I shall win it, or die in the attempt!"

As the young man stepped across the bar-room, on his way to the office, he was forced to pass the two conspirators where they stood; and, as Black Ben turned hastily around, he caught a full view of his face, when the eyes of Ben were flashing with hate directly into his own. This was but for an instant; but the expression, together with the look and the motion, struck the New Yorker as familiar, and he paused for a moment; but, seeing a rude stare on the faces of the two men, he touched his hat, and passed on, saying, in a pleasant open voice:

"Excuse my apparent rudeness, gentlemen; I thought that I had recognized the face of an old acquaintance."

"By St. Iago!" muttered Ben. "That was a narrow escape for you, Mr. Carrolton. I should have stabbed him to the heart, if he had spoken my name. Follow him, Antonio!"

The Mexican glided after him into the office, and listened.

"Can you tell me, sir, where I can find an honest lawyer?"

This was the question which the stranger put to the clerk.

"The verdict of the general public seems to be," said the clerk, "that an honest lawyer is hard to run against in any city; and San Antonio is no exception to the rule. But I can recommend one. His name is Mitchell, and his office is on the left side of the street leading out from the Main Plaza on its southeast corner."

"Thanks," said Carrolton, as he courteously raised his hat, and turned on his heel so quickly that he ran against the listening Antonio.

"Beg pardon," said the New Yorker, much confused; "I did not observe you, sir. By the way, you are one of the men I apologized to a moment ago? I am afraid you will think me the rudest kind of a barbarian."

The Greaser politely tipped his sombrero, and replied:

"No offense, senor! It was all my own fault. I was awkward."

Clarence passed out into the Alamo Plaza, crossed it, and proceeded up Commerce street to the Main Plaza, having caught, as he left, a malignant glance from the Mexican.

A certain indefinable expression in the repulsive black eyes of Antonio, as he bowed so politely to the stranger, caused a shudder to run through his frame, such as one feels when stepping unexpectedly on the squirming coils of a rattlesnake, and hears the dread signal of death from the venomous serpent. With an effort, he threw off the feeling, and laughed quietly to himself as he walked along, thinking how much he had been impressed by a single glance from a Greaser.

CHAPTER VI.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

We will now call a change of scene. The sun is setting, and to the west and east, as far as the eye can reach, there is not a break in the broad level plain that stretches from the Rio Grande to the Rio Leona, some five miles west from Wellington Ranch. To the north a ribbon of timber winds here and there in a serpentine course, shielding the rolling waters of the Rio Frio from the ardent gaze of the god of day.

At full speed across the plain, and toward the river, dashes a horde of war-painted Comanches, some sixty in number, their long

lances glittering in the rays of the declining sun, their naturally hideous faces rendered more unearthly, more fiendish, by being daubed with the war pigments, in stripes peculiar to their tribe, and by their snake-like eyes which glared with a thirst for blood, while their wild war-whoops cut the air in the vengeful exultation of fiends.

Ahead of these Bedouins of the plains flies a single horseman—an Indian—who, as if scorning the dread danger in his rear, whirls his rifle over his head, and answers the whoops of his pursuers with the long-drawn war-cry of the Tonkaways.

The mustang of the lone rider is covered with flecks of white foam, and spotted with blood from its mouth, which has been torn by the quick twitches of the rawhide jaw-strap as the Indian urges his panting steed to new and greater efforts in the race for life.

The arms and trappings of the fleeing Tonkaway indicate that he has mingled with the whites. The eagle feathers which flaunt from his proud poised head, and the bear-claw collar which decorates his neck, prove him a chief; while his general bearing shows that he is as brave and fearless as any man, be he white or red, that ever faced an enemy in the field.

This lone Indian chief is Turtle, the Tonkaway.

Upon his broad breast, done in vermillion and blue, is a perfect representation of a turtle, with its head, tail and claws projecting from the shell, as if in energetic action. On, on toward the Rio Frio, he bounds, the mustang straining every nerve and muscle to reach the timber, and seeming to realize that within the shades ahead of them are safety and rest from the long and terrible gallop for life.

Nearer and nearer comes the yelling horde of Comanches, until not two rifle shots in space intervene. Suddenly the Tonkaway jerks his mustang to a halt, whirls the animal facing his pursuers, and again from his throat bursts the war-cry of his tribe. That moment he brought his rifle to a rest in the hollow of his left arm, while, with his fingers clutched firmly around the small of the breach, he pulled back the hammer with a quick snap, causing his horse to tremble in every limb. Still he sat his mustang proudly and statue-like, and still on they came; feathers flaunting, lances glittering, many with arrows fitted to their bow-strings, and all sure of capturing or killing him whom they have long known as a detested Tonkaway, who has affiliated with their Texan foes.

Quick as a flash of light Turtle tossed his rifle to his shoulder, and apparently without aim, pulled the trigger.

A sharp report echoed through the adjacent timber, followed by a horrid death-yell, and then the air was filled with fierce whoops as the war party, in a maddened mob, lashed their snorting ponies on toward the Tonkaway chief.

But Turtle was not idle. Half a dozen leaden messengers of death from his Sharp's rifle went hurtling through the air, while, with a taunt of derision, he turned his mustang, bent low on the animal's neck, and whirled his quirt hissing about its hams. Straight ahead, as if shot from a catapult went the frenzied steed toward the dark shades of the Frio, but a few hundred yards from it.

Doubly enraged, now that some of their best braves lay upon the plain, the Comanches lashed their ponies in swift pursuit, uttering unearthly yells of vengeance.

Just as the sun sinks below the horizon, Turtle dashes into the timber, and halts under the thick branches of the pecan trees; his head-dress of eagle's feathers mingling with the long festoons of Spanish moss, and a score of arrows cutting through above it.

The belt of timber was soon passed; and the chief, slinging his rifle over his shoulder, stood erect in his saddle, and grasped a stout hanging vine. Once more he gave his taunting war-cry, and then gave his mustang a blow, as he sprung, hand over hand, up the vine, and disappeared among the thick moss and leaves.

His keen ears told him that his horse had plunged into the river, and he listened until he knew that it had clambered in safety up the opposite bank. With a grunt of satisfaction he heard also the Comanches crashing in wild confusion through the tangled vines and bushes, on the trail of his steed; and then, with the agility of a panther, he sprung from limb to limb through the thick growing timber

toward the plain from which he had just fled for his life.

Only a short distance, however, does he proceed in this manner, for he knows it is wasting precious time.

He drops directly upon the recently trampled trail, taking care that his moccasined feet make no sign among the hoof-prints, and bounds out upon the plain.

Behind him, and down the stream, he hears the yells of the Comanches, and knows that his mustang, in its jaded state, has kept in the timber, and avoided going out upon the wide, open prairie beyond. This is as he had hoped, for it favors his plans, giving him more time, and preventing them from seeing that he is not upon his horse. Ahead of him he sees the outstretched forms of the dead Comanches. From one to another he rushes, until he finds one of his own size; and grasping the form in his arms, he kicks up the grass upon which it had lain, making the spot appear as natural as possible, and noticing that no blood had marked it.

This done, Turtle retraced his steps to the timber, and crossed it until he reached the bank of the river at the same place where the war-party had, a few minutes previous, urged their animals into the stream.

Here he threw himself prostrate; and tearing some moss from the bank below the water, he washed the war-paint from the face of the dead Comanche, and threw the moss into the rapid running river. Then, with quick movements, he tore off the war gear and leggins from the dead body, and dressed it in his own, even to the bear-claw collar and the eagle-feathers. The Tonkaway was aware that he had to deceive eyes that were sharp as his own, so that he lost not an instant in carrying out his peculiar and difficult purpose. With artistic touch, he decorated the face of the dead with the war stripes of his own tribe. This accomplished, he ran back and picked up an arrow which had missed its intended mark in the chase, and, with nice calculation, placed it against the back of the dead brave, and forced the weapon through, causing the point to project from the wound that had been made by his own bullet.

Turtle watched his work for but a moment, for the ringing yells of the baffled Comanches, who were now returning on the trail, urged him to prompt action.

Attiring himself in the leggins and accouterments of the dead, and grasping it again in his arms, he secreted his rifle and powder-flask, and, dropping into the stream, swam with the current for a short distance. He then placed one arm of the dead warrior carelessly around a bush near the shore; the branches of which partly supported the corpse, and prevented it from sinking. He had been none too quick in his movements.

The Comanches were near at hand, but the Tonkaway's purpose was accomplished; and he vanished from sight, in the dark rolling waters of the friendly Rio Frio.

As much at home in the water as his namesake, the Turtle swam beneath the surface for some distance, and then came up the bank among the thick bushes and drooping vines.

It was growing dark, which favored the chances for the success of the deception he had been attempting. In their excitement, he felt assured, the dead brave would not for some little time be missed. He had planned his ruse to cause them to think that he had received his death-shot in the timber, and slid from his horse while the animal was fording the stream; having sufficient life remaining, to grasp the bush in his dying struggles. His rifle, they would naturally suppose, had sunk in the stream.

Through the thick underbrush came the Comanches, their mustangs snorting with pain and almost broken down by their headlong gallop, after having traveled hundreds of miles since leaving the distant villages on the borders of the Llanos Estacados.

With eyes bulging in terror, as the yells of the warriors pierced the air, on plunged the wild steeds, tearing through bush and bramble; the leaders coming to a halt on the river bank, while, by twos and threes, the lingerers joined them. As they made halt, the sharp eyes of the braves glittered, as they roved up and down the stream; each silent and sitting on his steed, and forming a picture that was wild, and strange, and horrible. But Turtle gazed down upon the scene with a stoical expression on his face, which betrayed no fear of

the terrible death by torture, which he would be called upon to suffer, should he be discovered.

Soon a ringing yell of exultation broke from one of the braves, while, at the same moment, he thrust his lance point into the earth, threw his rein and quiver to his neighbor, and plunged into the Rio Frio.

Following the direction of the gaze and movements of the Comanche, the assembled warriors discovered the corpse in masquerade; its Tonkaway war-paint and feathers showing plainly by contrast with the dark waters.

A round of terrific whoops echoed up and down the river, as the brave dragged the supposed body of the Tonkaway chief up the opposite bank, drew his knife, and with a dexterous movement, tore both scalp and eagle-plume from the head of the corpse, and then waved it in the air above his head, while from his throat came the war-cry of his tribe, and the yell of victory!

The Comanches hurriedly forded the river and encamped, staking their horses on the plain; they then proceeded to bring the bodies of their dead, sounding their awful, long-drawn howls in the meanwhile.

After laying their slain, side by side, together, in a small gulley, they dragged the body of the supposed Tonkaway chief into the midst of their camp, building a fire, and binding the corpse to a tree. After this, the warriors, brandishing their knives and tomahawks in the air, danced in hideous glee about the dead; sprung, in spasmodic hop and bound, circling in the firelight, like exultant demons, each giving hack or thrust with knife or hatchet, as he passed what he thought was the senseless form of the foe they had so much dreaded.

With stealthy and cat-like movements, Turtle made his way through the branches of the trees, regaining his rifle and ammunition; and then silently glided away in the darkness down the Rio Frio, well satisfied in having deceived his cunning foes, although at the sacrifice of his eagle-feathers and bear-claw collar—articles which are ever prized most highly by those whose rank gives them the right to wear them proudly.

Well might the Tonkaway chief be proud of his achievement; for, by a voluntary exposure of himself to almost death upon the plains, he had led the Comanche war party from their direct course, and then, by causing them to think that he had been killed, had forced them to camp where they were, and thereby preventing this hostile tribe from pursuing their course, as they had intended, down the Rio Frio, that night.

Turtle, the friendly Tonkaway, had saved his faithful and devoted friends, white though they were, at Wellington Ranch, from being butchered in cold blood!

CHAPTER VII.

A WILL AND A SOLILOQUY.

ERECT as a soldier on parade walked Clarence Carrolton, picking his way here and there, striving not to come in contact with man or animal; an open, honest smile upon his face and his eyes filled with a deep interest in the strange surroundings.

"He's a tenderfoot, but a dang'd long way from being a slouch," remarked a ranchero, as he passed.

"Anybody what butts ag'in' that pilgrim 'll stand a show ter chaw dirt," said another, indorsing him.

"Yer can't stuff green 'simmons down his whisky ditch."

"Thet coon hev got a heap o' sand in his gizzard."

Such remarks passed right and left as Clarence crossed the Main Plaza and entered the law office.

Antonio, the Mexican spy, followed, and made his way to the rear of the old adobe building which Clarence had entered. The windows were open, and crawling along without being observed, the Greaser crouched low and listened intently.

"Mr. Mitchell," said the young man, "I wish to engage you as my legal adviser; and, to start business, I would like to have you draw up my last will and testament."

The lawyer invited him to be seated, and he continued:

"I have but just arrived in your beautiful city, on a mission of justice, connected with which I am about to make a trip to the frontier; and, knowing that I am liable to lose my

scalp, I wish to have my affairs in a shape that will give but little trouble to those who are most interested in them."

The Mexican heard a rattling of papers, and an occasional word from the lawyer. Clarence went on:

"I have come into possession of a large fortune, which by rights belongs to a young lady who resides in this State; and I wish, in the event of my death, to leave behind me papers which will show that I had intended that this property should revert to her. She, as I have said, is the legal heir, although she had a brother who was stolen in childhood, and who may be alive."

"I have here a large amount of stock and bonds, as well as certificates of deposit, which I wish to leave with you. These are to be subject to the order of the young lady who is to be benefited by the will which I desire you to make. I would have you execute it also, should I not put in an appearance within three months. I wish it to be known, as well, that I left this city with the express purpose of seeing her at her home, and of ascertaining if any intelligence has been gained in regard to her missing brother."

Antonio, having now learned the object of the young man's visit, stole away from the window. When he reached Commerce street he was greeted by a man who had just turned the corner of the Main Plaza.

"Senor Monte Mose?" he exclaimed, in a questioning way.

"That's me; but somewhat changed by a shave, and by these new togs. Did you find out anything about the Man from New York?" he inquired.

"Senor Carrolton is in San Antonio," said the Mexican.

"Carrolton is his name, is it? Where is he now?"

"Senor Carrolton stops at the Menger House, but he is now at the office of lawyer Mitchell," said Antonio.

"Ah! is that so? I wonder what's in the wind now?"

"The caballero from New York is having his will made," was the reply, with a sardonic grin on his face.

"Has he found out that he may have enemies in the place, think you?" asked Monte Mose.

"All who have gold have enemies," said the Mexican. "He knows that much, I suppose. Where is Senor Ben?"

"I have not seen Black Ben since you were with him on the Alamo Plaza," said Mose, turning away.

Mose had changed greatly since he had left Immeke's card-room. He had purchased a new suit, with sombrero, and a red silk sash, or chamarra, which was wound around his waist; a long fringed end hanging down each outer seam of his pants, *a la Mexicano*.

Entering the shop of an old pawnbroker, known as Uncle Jose, Mose soon emerged, with an army revolver and a huge bowie-knife buckled about his waist, giving him the air of a *bona fide* prairie sport. He seated himself at the foot of the flag-staff on the Military Plaza, and burying his face in his hands, he plunged into deep thought, and a low soliloquy:

"I have been a loafer, a bummer, and a dead beat! I have drank a heap of whisky. But I never stole a cent, I never forged a man's name, I never was in jail, and—thank God! I never wronged a woman! Black Ben has done the square thing by me, so far; but I don't like that Greaser pard of his. I hardly know what I have promised him. I don't believe my brains were ever in such a demoralized condition before. But I won't be led into any criminal act. I shall try to make a stake out of what money I have left, and return the exact amount that Ben has advanced me; and then I can quit business with him at any time, without asking any odds."

"What and who is he? Now that I am cool and sober, I remember having heard dark hints thrown out in regard to him. Oh! that I had the strength to resist this consuming thirst which keeps leading me on!"

"Here, I have been drinking on this day, of all days—the anniversary of my meeting with Celeste!"

"Poor Celeste Carillo! For two years we have loved, and for half of that time I have shown myself unworthy to sweep the path that she has trod."

Mose sprung like a wild man to his feet, but

soon resealed himself with a hoarse, derisive laugh, which sounded strangely unnatural, and resumed:

"Sometimes, in my worst fits, I see a face which hovers in chaotic space, and, with winning smiles, seems to beckon me on and upward."

"I remember, about six months ago, when I got on a terrible spree, Bob Caile gave me a twenty spot when he broke Saunders's bank, and I went it, hot and heavy. I went out among the mesquites between the town and the San Pedro Springs, and crawled into the chaparral to sleep. It was there, when I was awakened by the sun's hot rays pouring upon my face, that I saw it. She was a beautiful girl, and she seemed to be stooping over me. I opened my eyes. There was a look of deep pity upon her lovely face; but, as I gazed into her eyes, she turned away, sprung upon her horse, and was gone."

"What had she done? The small branches torn from the bushes, that she had let fall in her haste, told that she had been brushing the flies from my bloated face."

"But that was not all. She dropped, as she left my side, this delicate fabric of lace and cambric. I have kept it in my bosom—kept it from the gaze of every one. Even Celeste has never seen this handkerchief, nor have I dared to tell her of it."

As the young man spoke, he drew from his breast a little handkerchief, bordered with costly lace, and having in one corner, embroidered in colored silk, a monogram. Mose smoothed it out, and said:

"'F. W.' That is no clew. There is no lady in San Antonio, of whom I can hear, with these initials."

"How those letters seem to dance, and crawl, and squirm, one within the other! The court-house is 'sashaying' around the confounded old Plaza. Mose, old boy, I believe you are on the very verge of having the jim-jams. It is no angel face that looks down upon me now. They have vanished, and the snakes and devils will come next—ay, enough of them to start a dozen menageries; and then, God help you, Mose!"

"I have spent a part of Black Ben's infernal money, but I will try my luck at the Bull's Head to-night, and, if I win—and I must win—I will pay him back, and then we are quits."

"I can't turn around and work against a man who has done me a good turn when I was in need; not, at least, until I am even with him, and have first proved him to be a villain."

"Now that each expression of his dark face comes like a panorama before my mind's eye, and every word of his sounds clearly in my ear again, I know that he is not an honest man. To be sure, I have never heard that any one ever accused him of being one; but that was none of my business—not up to the present moment. If I have now formed a correct opinion of him, from his own words and acts, he is bent upon murdering a man who may be a true gentleman, and who may never have harmed him."

"Of one thing I am certain: Black Ben must have a strong object in view, in associating himself with me, or he never would have given me so much money in advance; but he will find out, I can tell him, that if he thinks to make a tool of me to do his criminal work, that a sharp edge will be turned against him. I will defeat his plans, and save this man, if it is possible to do so."

Tearing a leaf from a little memorandum book, Mose wrote a few words and then folded the note into a compact form. This done, he strode down the street, and into the Main Plaza, crossing it diagonally.

At the same moment he saw a young man, of fine appearance, open the door of Mitchell's office and step out.

It had now become quite dark, and the crack of whips and the cries of teamsters resounded on all sides, as the wagon trains rumbled out by the various streets to the camping places up and down the river on the outskirts of the town. No sooner did Monte Mose observe the young man emerge from the lawyer's office than his mind became strongly impressed with the idea—indeed, he was almost convinced that he was the person spoken of by Antonio as Senor Carrolton, the man who was in danger of being assassinated by Black Ben or his Mexican pard.

Determined to warn him of his deadly peril, let the consequences to himself be what they might, Mose walked along, aiming to intercept the New Yorker.

Hurriedly glancing around him in every direction, and satisfying himself that neither Black Ben nor the Greaser were among the moving stream of pedestrians, Mose managed to brush past Clarence Carrolton in the crowd and slip the note which he had just written into his hand, without the New Yorker having the slightest knowledge in regard to the unknown friend who had thus strangely put it within his grasp.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HARD CROWD.

STEPPING into a cigar store, Clarence Carrolton smoothed out the crumpled piece of paper and read:

"TO THE MAN FROM NEW YORK:

"You seem to realize the uncertainty of life to some extent, as I learn you have just made your will. Your life is in great danger. A plot has been formed to assassinate you. Your business in Texas is well known to a merciless enemy, but you have one true friend."

A curious emblem occupied the place of the signature. Never was a man more astonished than was Clarence Carrolton when it caught his eye.

"Thank God, he lives! At last I have a clew; but in what a strange manner has it come to me."

Seeing that he was attracting the notice of the many loungers in the store, Clarence placed the note in his pocket-book, and with a quick step, passed into the Plaza.

The device which so gladdened his heart was that of a cross, shamrock and thistle. The Greek cross proved beyond a doubt that a certain person lived who had long been supposed to be dead; and not only this, but it relieved his mind greatly that both the legal heirs to the estate which he was only holding in trust were alive. He might now hope to be able to bring together a brother and sister who had never met.

The New Yorker came to a halt opposite the great market-house of the Alamo City. A crowd of Mexicans were lounging near at hand in excited debate, and he seated himself on the limestone steps of the building to rest, and at the same time to watch their movements, which struck him as suspicious. He soon concluded that he had nothing to fear in that quarter, so he arose and sauntered along till he came opposite the market, and almost into the door of the Bull's Head, the most noted monte house in all Western Texas. The house was in full blast to-night.

Few in the whole State did not know the proprietor, Bob Caile, and his major-domo, Crazy Nace; both of whom have passed in their chips and quit the game of life, the former but a short time ago.

Clarence Carrolton, before he knew the character of the house, stood for a moment at the door which led into the bar, and saw a rush of Mexicans into the front entrance, who crowded a party of Texans outside, amid yells and curses.

Those who had been pushed into the street, rushed around to the side-door where Clarence stood, and the young man found himself in a motley crowd, who thrust him before them into the bar, while loud whoops and the clash of knives rung on every side. Although he had thus been forced into the Bull's Head against his will, he knew it had been through accident, and, now that he was inside, he determined to stand his ground, and see the thing out. Standing amid the crowd of yelling Texans, with his weapons ready for use, the young New Yorker prepared to take a hand, should he be forced to do so. The combatants were now facing each other with fury in their eyes.

Three-fourths of the Mexicans in the room were of the very lowest order; and they now stood, with their white teeth clinched, and their lips curled, like wolves at bay; clutching cuchillos in hand, and ready to spring upon a young American, who was scarcely more than a boy in appearance. This youth was dressed in a fancy buckskin suit, richly embroidered, and had a soft, black sombrero upon his head.

He was small, slender in stature, graceful in his movements, and the flash of his eye proved that, although he was in a tight place, he was equal to the emergency. The young Texan now stood, facing a throng of infuriated Greasers, his left foot upon the body of one, and holding a revolver in each hand.

He at once attracted the notice of Clarence, and, by remarks which passed among those who had forced him with them into the bar, the New Yorker found that he was known as

Fighting Ben—a name which struck Carrolton at the moment as most appropriate.

"When steel is trumps, I have no objection to take a hand," called out this young man, "but when you run too many decks in, and all play against me, I reckon it's about time to draw my shooters, for I don't think I was born to be hashed by Greaser knives. Sheathe your knives, every cowardly son of a coyote among you, or I'll send a round dozen on the *jornada del muerto*!"

With snapping eyes and deep curses, the Mexicans slowly put up their knives, cowed by the cool determination of the youth whose firm hands held the deadly tubes ready, at the slightest advance upon him, to send a rattling fusillade into the midst of them.

"Ha! ha! ha! Well, dog-gone my half-sister's black cat!"

This remark came from a burly Texan, who stood with folded arms and pistols ready, in the rear of Clarence. He noticed that this man was one of the party who had been so anxious to get inside the bar.

"Ben Thompson!" yelled this huge border-man, "I 'lowed yer'd sweep the table clean when yer jerked yer shooters!"

Then, turning to the crowd of Mexicans, the man continued:

"Why in thunderation doesn't some on yer toe ther mark? I'll bet my ranch ag'in' all ther nags yer kin steal fer a hull year out o' Tuscusa County that Leetle Ben kin cut half-a-dozen on yer inter saddle-strings afore a Rocky Mountain goat could take two skips. Quit a-chawin' yer livers! Walk out, an' show yer hes got sand enough in yer gizzards fer a squar' toe an' toe slash. Come this a-ways, Reckless Joe! I reckons that we-'uns, 'long o' this yere stranger, kin kinder see Ben through, an' not 'low too many o' ther Rio Grande kiotes ter rush in on ther whiz with ther stickers. Stranger, shake! Yer 'pears ter be straight up an' squar' an' we 'tend ter count yer in fer this yere leetle game."

With full appreciative admiration for the bravery and undoubted honesty that beamed from the blue eyes of the burly Texan, as well as for the true manhood which was shown by the few Americans who where in the room, and who now stood so firm for their countryman against such heavy odds, Clarence grasped the hands which each in turn extended; an act which, taken in connection with his frank, open manner, and the determined expression on his face, showed that he was with them to the death. It was a new experience for the young New Yorker, but he stood the test nobly.

At a glance, Carrolton was favorably impressed with the appearance of the young man whom he had heard designated as Reckless Joe; for the latter now stood by Fighting Ben, both being costumed exactly alike, but very opposites in complexion—Joe being decidedly fair, and with flaxen hair and light blue eyes, while his friend had a rich, dark skin, and eyes and hair which perfectly corresponded.

The entire scene, which we have recorded, transpired in a minute's space; and it was evident to the Americans, as well as to all who were gathered near Fighting Ben, that the challenge of the latter was about to be accepted in earnest.

When the Mexicans had returned their knives to their sheaths, Ben had replaced his revolvers in his belt; and soon, after a brief consultation with his fellows, a short thick-set Greaser jerked out his knife and stepped forward, his ugly features distorted by the fiercest hate, and holding his sombrero in his left hand as a shield, with his long, murderous cuchilla firmly gripped in his right, the blade pointing downward along his sleeve. It was evidently the tug of war.

Fighting Ben, with a confident glitter in his dark eyes, threw off his jaqueta, tossed aside his sombrero, and then, drawing his bowie, stood braced for the seemingly unequal conflict. It was as Goliath to David. The Mexican was almost a giant.

"We want a clean board here, Big Foot," cried out Reckless Joe, as he grasped a leg of the Greaser that Ben's firm foot had held upon the floor. His huge Texan friend stooped, and with one hand quietly yanked the wounded and prostrate Mexican out of the way of the duelists. A deep groan followed this movement, which brought a murmur of indignant curses from the Mexicans, whose hands again

flew to their knives; but, at the same instant, came a lightning-like play of steel between Fighting Ben and his gigantic opponent.

The game opened. Back and forth, steel clashing against steel, each with eyes that glared and burned into those of the other, the two men fought, until suddenly, with a movement quick as thought the bowie of Ben Thompson cut the air and slashed through the sombrero of the Greaser, sending the hat whirling across the room; and then, before the latter could recover his guard, the spectators of the fearful contest saw the knife of the young Texan plunged to the hilt in the breast of his antagonist.

With a horrible, unearthly yell, the Mexican sprung backward, the bowie was withdrawn, and, as the hot blood spurted from his breast, he fell with a sickening thud to the floor. For a moment all was quiet as death. The Texans and Mexicans stood gazing at each other. Then, with loud yells from the former, and vengeful cries from the latter, they once more, mingled in fierce fight.

"Don't shoot, boys! For your lives, don't shoot, I tell yer! Hoop-la! I'm a comin', bet yer lives on it!"

So sung out the burly Texan scout, Big-Foot Wallace.

One after another, in quick succession, was launched through the air, or felled senseless by a single blow of his huge fist, while Clarence, Ben and Joe, with their Texan followers, rushed in, knocking the Mexicans to the floor with their revolvers, and receiving but slight hurts in the *melee*. In a short space of time the room was cleared, and the Texans stood panting, having driven the horde of Greasers into the street, and that, thanks to the warning of Big Foot, without firing a shot. The command was a rational one, for the use of fire-arms would have endangered their own lives.

The street was now filled with a howling mob, the very lowest of the rabble from the Mexican quarter of San Antonio, and, before the Texans had begun to recover from their exertions, a tall, fierce-looking Greaser, with a red bandana bound tightly about his head, and a knife in his hand, rushed into the bar, followed by some dozen others, and all eager for fight.

CHAPTER IX. THE COMPACT.

THE leader bounded forward toward Clarence Carrolton with his knife uplifted, singling him out from the others, because, their attention being directed from him, they were not aware of the danger he was in.

Just in time Fighting Ben saw the peril of the stranger, and with a quick movement he struck the knife-hand of the Greaser a violent blow with his revolver, not having time to cock his pistol, and knocked the deadly cuchilla to the floor. Big Foot, who saw this, at the same instant gave the Mexican a terrific kick, which hurled him against the door of the bar, which swung open to the wall. In an instant Fighting Ben grasped the knife of the New Yorker, and hurled that and his own, with the quickness of thought, one after the other. With fierce thuds these knives pierced flesh and wood firmly, fastening the hand of the dastardly wretch to the open door.

With a howl of pain the Greaser turned his head over his shoulder, expecting other knives to be thrust into his back.

As Clarence Carrolton looked, now for the first time, into the repulsive eyes of the man so painfully fastened to the door, he recognized the Mexican whom he had seen at the hotel, and again he felt a cold chill run through him, as the snake-like gaze, filled with hate, met his own.

At this moment Big Foot pushed the door outward, that the crowd on the side-walk could see the condition of their friend, when a man rushed in, drew out the knives, and, taking the arm of the Greaser, hurried off; but the New Yorker caught one glimpse of his face, and knew him to be the same person to whom he had apologized for his seeming rudeness at the Menger House.

It was Black Ben, and the Mexican, who had been so cleverly impaled, was the spy, Antonio.

When the latter had reported the business of Carrolton at the lawyer's office to his employer, the latter induced him, by a heavy bribe, to get together some of the gang of bandits to which they both belonged, and assassinate the New Yorker in the street. The

row at the Bull's Head had given an opportunity for this; but, to his disgust, Antonio found that the young man had fallen in with the best of defenders.

Black Ben was greatly enraged at the failure of 'the scheme, for he had witnessed the whole affair from the street, and he dragged the bleeding Mexican hastily through the darkness toward the San Pedro Creek.

"Git ready with yer shooters!" yelled Big Foot. "We're sp'ilin' Bob Caile's biz 'bout now, but I reckon it'll be brisk an' kitin' afore mid-night."

"All ready, me lord duke!" reported Reckless Joe. "Lead on, King of the Post-oaks! Lead on to victory or death!"

Out from the Bull's Head rushed the Texans, shooting their revolvers in the air as they came.

The Greasers, wild with terror, ran like frightened sheep, and soon disappeared in the gloom in all directions.

The three dead Mexicans were carried out and left on the sidewalk at some distance from the house, the Texans knowing that the friends of the deceased would soon find and remove them. They then returned masters of the field.

"Hit are my treat this deal," said Big Foot, as they re-entered the bar, "an' 'pears to me I hain't bin so dang'd dry since I war up 'mong ther Sand Hills. Stranger," he continued, addressing Clarence, "I hain't never see'd yer afore ter-night, an' ef yer hes jist 'roved in this burg, I want ter tell yer thet Big Foot Wallace are yer pard from this on. Ef yer does w'ar a b'iled shirt an' a heap of other civ'lized fixin's, yer chuck full o' starch, an' I'm bettin' yer squar' an' white. Shake an' gi'n us yer handle! I doesn't ax what it war in the States, fer I doesn't keer a dang."

"My name," said the young man, "is Clarence Carrolton, and I as-ure you, I am proud to form the acquaintance of so celebrated a scout and ranger as Big Foot Wallace, of whom I have often read in my home in New York. Our friendship has been formed without much ceremony, and in a tragic manner; let us hope it will not end so."

"Heerd o' me in York! Bless my soul, are thet a fac'?" said the old scout, in astonishment. "Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat ef I thought I war know'd outside o' West Texas. Here, boys, glide this a-ways. This pilgrim are— But my strings, pard, yer hes sich a long handle, dog'd ef I kin remember hit!"

"Gentlemen," said the New Yorker, laughing, "my name is Carrolton, and I am greatly pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Glad to meet a man who has promenaded Broadway and the old Bowery," said Joe, shaking hands heartily.

"My address is Ben Thompson, Austin, Texas," said fighting Ben, "and I'm glad to add a white man to my list of friends. You took a hand worthy of a Texan, if you are from the States."

"As to my taking a hand," said Clarence, "I believe if you had not had your eyes open, had pinned that Mexican, I should have been killed. I owe you my life, and shall not forget it."

"Don't mention it," said Ben. "I would be a strange fellow if I didn't keep my eyes peeled to protect one who was risking his life for me. Did you ever meet that Greaser before?"

"Yes; I ran against him at the Menger House soon after my arrival to-day. I had also seen him with that American who released him from the door just now."

"There's something up," said Ben, as he poured out a glass of whisky. "But never mind, we'll investigate this thing and find out what it is. If he has an American as a pard, it will go hard with the latter if I catch him on a crooked trail."

"Some cigars with me, gentlemen," said Clarence; "and if you have no better way of passing your time, I should be very much pleased if you will walk over to my hotel."

"Mought jist es well glide toward ther Menger es any place else," agreed Big Foot. "This are ther last night I takes civilize in mine. I p'int's fer Frio post oaks at sun-up, dead sure an' sartin. Joe an' Ben, you jines me?"

"Yes," was the reply of Reckless Joe; "me very soul yearns to once more gaze o'er flower-decked plains. To stretch again me noble form on the banks of the Rio Frio. There

Joseph can sit by the camp-fire, and chew the juicy steak of antelope and deer, and jerk the flopping cat-fish from the cerulean waters. How is it with you, friend Thompson?"

"I'm with you on this trip, bet your life," was the reply.

"Did I understand you to say, gentlemen," inquired the New Yorker, "that you intended going toward the Frio river?"

"That's whar I 'lows ter camp, in three sleeps," said Big Foot.

Carrolton came to a sudden pause at this answer.

By this time the party had reached Commerce street, and leaning over the low railing of the bridge, Clarence looked down into the river, in the depths of which were mirrored the star-studded heavens.

"I feel," said he, "that I ought to confide in you. This evening, as I was walking on the Main Plaza I had a note thrust into my hand. It warned me that my life was in danger; and I now believe that the Mexican, who received such a rough, but deserved lesson from Mr. Thompson, is in the pay of some one to whom the warning was intended to refer. The strange signature to the note, also proves to me that a man whom I am anxious to find, who in part is interested in the business which brought me to Texas, and who was feared to be dead, must be alive, and in this city. I shall offer a large reward, in to-morrow's *Herald*, for the writer of this note, worded in such a way as to show him that benefit is intended. My object in coming here is a peculiar one. Do any of you, gentlemen, know a man on the Rio Frio by the name of Colonel Jack Wellington?"

"I've know'd him ever since he struck West Texas dirt," answered Big Foot; "an' we 'lows ter stop, an' say how-dy ter him when we scorts up t'er river nex' week. He's a squar' ole coon what fit inter ther Mex'can war."

"Can I make one of your party on the trip?" asked Clarence.

"Yer kin go, an' welcome," said the scout; "an' we'll be dog-goned glad ter hev yer 'long o' us. But I'd 'vise yer ter use Spauldin's glue fer ha'r ile 'fore yer starts."

"Boys," said the New Yorker; "consider me in on this deal, as Mr. Thompson says. I don't mind the Indians much."

"Wa al, now an' then, yer kin strike a good white red 'mong them; speshly 'mong the Tonkaways an' Wacoos."

"If the Frio is a dangerous spot to locate, how is it that Col. Wellington has gone there to live and taken his daughter?"

"Hal ha!" laughed the old scout. "Who tole yer he had a darter? That's ther biz, are hit! Wa al, I kin tell yer, ef yer never see'd her, she's the purtiest piece o' caliker yer ever friz yer peepers outer!"

"How I came to know that the colonel has a daughter," said Clarence, "will come out in good time. But, let us walk along. You have relieved my mind greatly, for I was puzzled in regard to how I should get into the company of honest men, who might be going toward the Frio. We will break a few bottles of Heidsieck at the bar of the Menger, and drink luck to my proposed expedition, which I hope will be of great benefit to all of us."

"We can promise you," said Fighting Ben, as he rolled a cigarrito, "that there will be plenty of fun, fighting, and fatigue on the trip. Are you a good shot, Carrolton?"

"I cannot claim to be a crack shot," was the reply; "but I have practiced both with pistol and rifle during a slow trip from the Gulf, and I think I might possibly hit a buck in the head, provided the animal was considerate enough to allow me a fair rest over its tail."

A long laugh from Big Foot awoke the echoes of the Alamo, in which he was joined by Joe and Ben; the entire party being more favorably impressed toward the speaker, as his words showed that he was not in the habit of indulging in the cheap commodity of brag.

Our friends now entered the Menger House, where they passed a few hours in social chat while they perfected their arrangements for the Frio trip, and, during the time, indulging freely in champagne and cigars, although the big scout persisted in sticking to his favorite beverage of "whisky straight," as, to use his own somewhat expressive words, he "did n't keer ter hev his brains on a stompede at sun-up."

As the eastern sky began to show signs of approaching morning Big Foot Wallace mounted his mustang, after first coming to an under-

standing with Fighting Ben, Reckless Joe and Clarence Carrolton, that they should meet him on the Rio Frio in three nights.

Then, with a wild yell, the scout drove spurs into his steed and dashed out of the Alamo Plaza, passing through the now deserted streets of the city at break-neck speed, and pointing for the Medina River through the scattering mesquites.

CHAPTER X.

MONTE MOSE IN THE TOILS.

LEADING the wounded Mexican along the narrow sidewalk from the Bull's Head, Black Ben passed through the Main and Military Plazas, and then entered a small jacal on the banks of the San Pedro.

"*Santissima!*" he hissed, in a voice of rage and vexation, as they shut the door. "You have made a bad mess of things this night, Antonio. You are a marked man from this out, and I wouldn't give a picayune for your life should you stay in town. Carrolton is the hero of the hour. He has beat you, and now it will be doubly dangerous for our band if we do cut his wind off. Why didn't you knife him at the start, and then cut through the crowd, as I said?"

Ben struck a light, which revealed the fact that the jacal was small and contained but one room.

Antonio thus far had not spoken a word.

Ben held the candle at arm's length above his head, throwing the light upon the Mexican's face. No sooner did he get a glimpse of him than a shudder ran through his frame; for the Greaser stood with both arms outstretched, the blood fast dripping from each, and his features convulsed by fiendish passion, while the muscles of his arms were twitching with pain. As his eyes glared into those of his chief, he hissed out a series of the vilest oaths, his yellow face turning ghastly in his rage.

"Carajo Carrolton! Demonios de Gringos! Diablos!"

"Well, I don't reckon you will have much love for the New Yorker after this," said Ben. "He understood throwing knives as well as a Chinese juggler, didn't he?"

"Did not Senor Thompson throw the cuchilas?" he asked.

"Not he, indeed," was Ben's reply. "I saw Carrolton do it."

Black Ben had an object in saying this. He wished to concentrate the hatred of his tool upon the New Yorker; and besides, he so feared Fighting Ben that he dreaded to have any of his band get into a difficulty with him.

"*Caramba!*" burst from the pain-drawn lips of the Mexican, as he clinched his bleeding hands; "I will cut his ears off, and dig his heart out! Why did El Negro Bravo say that this Americano was a chicken whose spurs had not sprouted yet?"

"I had no idea," said Ben, "that he had the sand which he has shown to-night. At all events you have found that his spurs have grown, and that he knows how to use them. Slip out to the San Pedro now, and wash your hands; and I will bind them up when you return. This night's work will force us to proceed to the Frio at once, if we would get to Wellington Ranch in advance of Carrolton. Don't fret, Antonio; I will promise you revenge. We will begin by stealing his girl, and then lay in wait for himself."

Groaning in agony, the Mexican passed out the door into the darkness, to bathe his wounds in the cool waters of the San Pedro. Returning, Black Ben performed the required surgical duties, and then spoke up, cheerfully:

"It may be all for the best. But, for your sake, if for nothing else, we must get out of this town to-night. Did you notify Augustine that we were coming to the Rio Frio?"

"Senor Jose left San Antonio for Wellington Ranch this evening; that is, if he kept his word."

"Do you think that any of the Texans recognized me?"

"No. Senor Ben took good care to keep outside the door."

"You bet I did, Antonio! If the Vigilantes knew that Black Ben and El Negro Bravo were one and the same man, it would soon be all up with me. By the way, it is strange where Monte Mose has disappeared to. He is the best recruit I have got for our gang in many a day; but he gets into a very honest mood at times. If he knew that he had entered into a compact with the chief of the Chaparral

Cooks, he would pretty soon back out. I hope he will soon turn up, for his name is on my black list. I shall work things to make him hate himself more than he does now, and then drive a knife to his heart. I want to use him in this job that we have on hand; and if I can get him to kill Carrolton, it will be a big jump toward revenge on the tribe he belongs to. Where are the horses, Antonio?"

"Pedro is with the mustangs over the creek, among the mesquites. But Senor Ben forgets that the Man from New York must die by the hand of Antonio."

"True. I did forget. However, I don't think Mose will care much about it. Pedro will find it dull by himself among the mesquites; let us join him."

Black Ben proceeded to fill a canteen from a jug which he took from a chest. While he was thus occupied, there came to the ears of the two men, a sound as of the shuffling of feet, and some one falling against the building.

Ben sprang to the door, his revolver ready, and in a low, stern voice, demanded:

"Who is there?"

Receiving no answer, he slowly opened the door, when the form of Monte Mose reeled against him.

Catching the drunken man by the shoulder, Ben jerked him into the jacal, and quickly closed the door.

"Didn't I ask you not to get drunk to-night, Mose?"

By a mighty effort Mose drew a bag from his pocket, and threw it at the feet of Black Ben; the noise, as it struck the floor, showing that it contained coin. He then endeavored to look at his questioner, and answer him, but in vain; his tongue was too heavy for speech.

"Never mind, old boy," said Ben, who in reality was rejoiced to see his recruit in such a state; "never mind, Mose, you'll be all right in the morning. Lead Mose over the creek, Antonio; I'll follow with the canteen and rifles. I see that our new friend is well beeled, as far as side-arms go."

The Mexican locked arms with Mose, and pulled him along, down the dark street, muttering, as he went, all sorts of curses as the drunken man reeled against him, thereby causing sharp pains to shoot along his muscles.

Black Ben followed close after, and the trio soon entered the mesquites, where they were challenged by Pedro.

"Help this man into your saddle, and secure him to the horse with a lariat," ordered Ben. "He's as drunk as an Irish lord. You will ride one of the extra nags bare-back until we get back to camp."

Soon all were galloping over the plain toward the Medina River, where, after less than two hours' ride, they made halt. Mose was then removed from the horse, and laid upon the sward, falling at once into a sound sleep.

"Hal ha! old boy," laughed Black Ben, as he bent over him; "I've got a dish cooked for you that will not leave a very pleasant taste after eating it."

Turning to Pedro, he said: "Do you know where we are?"

"Yonder is Senor Conner's ranch," said the Mexican.

"Just so," was the response. "I struck the river here with an object. Old Conner lives alone, and he sold two hundred beeves in San Antonio last week. He doesn't trust to banks."

"El Negro Bravo thinks that Senor Conner has lived long enough," suggested Pedro, putting his hand to his knife.

"You have guessed it, Pedro; and, as Antonio has lost his gripe for the present, you and I will attend to this job. Antonio, you can save your sand for Carrolton."

Moving off in the gloom, Black Ben and his comrade came to the pickets of a corral, which they followed until they reached the gate. Inside, near the pickets, stood several horses half asleep. Picking up a broken branch, Pedro stealthily thrust it under the tail of one of the horses. Quick as a flash of light, the animal brought its tail down over the stick, and then, with a snort of terror, sprang into the air, frightening the other horses, and they all plunged in a wild stampede across the corral.

Between them and the cabin stood a few scattering post-oaks, and behind two of these Ben and Pedro secreted themselves. The next moment an old man appeared in the doorway of the cabin, rifle in hand, he having evidently been aroused from sleep by the commotion.

"Dog gone ther coyotes!" he said; and, throwing his rifle into the hollow of his arm, he

proceeded along toward the corral, by a clearly-defined path.

Unconscious of his danger, the old rancharo walked on, his eyes fixed upon the horses, that were still galloping back and forth, the entire length of the corral.

With quick bounds the assassins sprang into the path, Black Ben dealing a crashing blow upon the old man's head with the breech of his rifle, while the Greaser thrust his long knife into the rancharo's back, as the latter fell with a heavy groan to the earth.

No sooner were the murderers satisfied that their bloody work had been effectual than they ran to the cabin, and ransacked it for the gold which they had reason to believe was secreted on the premises.

Both andita, being accustomed to searching for treasure thus hidden, soon unearthed from beneath an old raw-hide in one corner of the cabin several bags, which, to their practiced ears gave out the true clink.

Carefully filling in and stamping down the earth, they replaced the raw-hide, removing all signs of their presence.

This done, they made their way back to where they had left Antonio mounting guard over Monte Mose.

Throwing down the bags of gold, they caught up Mose, who was still in a lethargy, and bore him through the oaks to the point where lay the murdered man. Laying him down beside the corpse, the two friends in human shape placed the bloody knife within the grasp of the drunken man. Then they quietly withdrew.

"Do you comprehend my trick, Pedro?" asked B-n.

"No, senor," replied the Mexican, much surprised.

"Come on, and I will explain it to you," returned El Negro Bravo. "You see, this man is too square to associate with or to belong to our crowd; and I want to bring him down to our level, besides placing him in a position that will make him fear for his own safety. When he awakens, he will think that he has murdered Old Conner while drunk; and I shall take good care to impress his mind with the fact. This will put him in my power. Now, do you see it?"

"Si, senor," exclaimed Pedro, with a sardonic laugh. "El Negro Bravo is a great plotter; but why do a he trouble his head to such an extent about this man?"

"Because I hate and detest all who belong to his family; although he, poor devil, is innocent of any wrong to me, and does not even know who his own parents were. I have use for him, Pedro. I intend to use him as a tool to betray his own sister; and, if things turn out so that I will not require his services in that direction, I'll kill him as I would a dog!"

CHAPTER XI.

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY.

THREE months previous to the opening of our story, Turtle the Tonkaway had been found by Col. Wellington, in the bottom timber of the Rio Frio, where he had secreted himself, after having been chased and wounded by a war-party of Apaches. At Wellington Ranch he had been kindly cared for, and nursed back to health; and, while there, had been taught a smattering of English. Up to that time, Turtle had been a scout for Rangers and mustangers; but now he made his headquarters at Wellington Ranch, being devoted to the colonel and his daughter.

On the day previous to the one on which we have seen him chased by the Comanches, he had been in the camp of Big Foot Wallace, for whom he entertained the highest respect. Being out on a hunt for deer, on the evening we first introduced him to the reader, he discovered the Comanche war-party from the lurking place in which he was waiting for his game.

With much concern he saw that, riding in the direction in which they were, they would, by sunset discover the cabin of his friends, and murder those to whom every tie of gratitude bound him. Then it was that he resolved to expose himself, and thus lure them from their course. With this noble idea, he led the Comanches direct to the Rio Frio in the mad chase; and eventually, by his cunning, forced them to encamp at some distance above; thus giving him time to warn his friends of their approach, and go for assistance.

Colonel Wellington and Flora were seated in their usual lounging place. The dense, cool

shade of the timber was falling over the cabin, as the hour of sunset approached. The young girl, with glowing cheeks and a loving smile, just returned from a dash into the timber, had seated herself by her father.

"You seem to enjoy yourself greatly, my dear," said the old man, as he caressed the fair girl's hair.

"Seem to enjoy myself, papa? Why, I am supremely happy. What a bracing gallop I have just had! And did I not have glorious sport fishing in the creek this morning! I must confess, however, had not Picayune accompanied me to take the fish off the hook, I should have been forced to drag the first one I caught all the way home. It did look hideous."

"I am very much afraid you will have an opportunity to make a close comparison between those catfish and a branch of the fern family, if you persist in going into the timber."

"In what way, papa?"

"Have I not told you that there are panthers in these woods, and that those beasts are very dangerous?"

"Well, yes, papa; I do remember that you warned me in regard to them; but I always take my rifle with me, you know."

"But Flora," said the colonel, "your rifle is a small bore, and did you not hit a vital spot, which would be very doubtful in the excitement of the moment, the panther would tear you in pieces before you could escape from him."

"I think, papa, that you are getting to be nervous and apprehensive of danger. Have you been dreaming of Indians again?" And as she spoke Flora clasped her hands, and resting them upon her guardian's knee, gazed into his face with a look of solicitude, as she continued:

"Papa Wellington, I very much fear that you will make yourself ill. You worry too much in regard to my future."

"Well, child," said the old gentleman, "I must plead guilty on that score. Your welfare has been a subject which has been uppermost in my mind of late. I promised your mother, not only that I should care for you and love you, but also that I would seek, by every means possible, to discover her son. I am greatly troubled by the thought that I may not have proceeded with proper judgment in the search, and that your brother, if alive, may be in actual want, or may have been brought up in a bad way. I do hope and pray that I may live to see him—live to see you both happy in each other's society and enjoying the wealth which by right belongs to you. By the way, it is strange, is it not, that we have not received a letter from Clarence Carrolton?"

Looking at Flora as he said the words, Colonel Wellington perceived that she was weeping.

"My darling," he exclaimed, "how lacking I am in judgment! Here I have been speaking of what must cause you pain, and which I had better have deferred explaining to you for some time to come. And yet, I thought that you ought to be told, for I may be taken from you at any time."

Raising Flora in his arms, he seated her on his knee.

"Do not mind my tears, papa," she said. "You were right to speak of these facts, which are connected so closely with my history. I cannot help thinking of my poor, friendless brother. Oh, I do so wish that we could find him! I want to see him, and tell him that my heart has been filled with sorrow since you told me that I had a brother, and that he had never known a parent's or a sister's love. I should not feel so sad could I but think he had been blessed with as devoted a friend as I have, who has been so much to me."

The old soldier held his darling closely in his arms for some moments, both too full of deep feeling for words. Suddenly a crashing among the bushes in the direction of the river attracted the attention of both, and out of the opening sprang a snorting steed, the little negro Picayune being upon its back, and lashing the animal furiously, while he looked back in terror.

Up to the veranda he galloped, and the boy rolled off on the sward at his master's feet, while the mustang dashed toward the corral, where it was caught by Augustine.

"What is the matter, Pic?" demanded the colonel.

The boy rolled his eyes upward and turned his face toward the river-bottom, as if dreading something from that quarter.

"Speak!" commanded his master. "What have you seen?"

"Gor A'mi'ty, Marse Carnell! Dem head-skinners done come!"

"What do you mean? Who are they?" questioned the colonel, his face turning pale as he spoke so, showing that he knew too well to whom the frightened boy alluded.

"Dem Injuns what moder done tole me 'bout, what sash all de wool offen dis nigga's head!"

"Where did you see them?"

"Out on de perrarer, jess comin' 'long dis a-ways."

Colonel Wellington waited no longer, but sprang into the cabin, returning with his rifle and field-glass. He had not the slightest doubt of the truth of the boy's report. Flora stood motionless until her guardian had left her side. Then, with a light step, she also entered the cabin, and emerged with a small rifle in her hand. Passing the ribbon of timber, they both soon came to a point from which they could view the open prairie.

"What do you see on the plain, papa? Anything to cause us immediate alarm, do you think?"

"Look for yourself, my dear," he said, handing her the glass. "Look to the south-west, near the timber, and you will see that which, if you realize the dangers of the frontier, will cause your heart to chill."

Flora trembled slightly, but elevated the glass and brought it to bear on the point which the colonel designated.

"What do you see, Flora? I can scarce understand it."

"I see a large party of mounted Indians going at full speed," she answered. "They seem to be in pursuit of a single horseman, who is galloping toward the timber."

"When I looked," said Colonel Wellington, "that horseman seemed to be riding toward them. Pass me the glass, my child. I confess I do not understand the situation."

"What now, papa? Who is he, do you suppose?"

"I cannot say," was the reply, "but I am positive that, whoever he may be, he is as brave and noble a man as ever lived; for I am sure he is risking his life—braving a horrible death—for our benefit!"

"For our benefit, papa? What do you mean?"

"That man, Flora, has attracted the attention of that hostile tribe, who, when I first observed them, were bearing down in the direction of our home, to himself. This he has done to draw them from their course. I am sure of it. There can be no other reason for his exposing himself."

"Oh, papa, is there no escape for us, do you think?"

"Thanks to this man, whoever he may be, there is hope that we may. Fly for home, Flora; I will follow you soon."

Our heroine, with terror in her eyes, started toward the river, now realizing more fully their great danger; but she had not taken a dozen steps when her guardian called out:

"Run, my daughter! Run! The red fiends are close upon our would-be preserver, and I can hear their horrible war-cries borne down upon the breeze."

Flora Wellington came to a halt and stood listening and trembling, as several rifle-shots, in quick succession, sounded from up the Rio Frio.

"Run, Flora!" called out the colonel once more. "We must prepare for defense or flight. He who would have saved us is doomed, and he our best friend, my child—Turtle, the Tonkaway!"

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE FRIO.

TWENTY miles east of Wellington Ranch, on the same evening that the Tonkaway chief so nobly risked his life, standing in the middle of a small, clear space, covered with a carpet of rich bottom grass, and but a few yards from the Rio Frio, is the only living thing of any size, within the scope of vision—a mule.

The animal is a most pitiable looking object, being covered with fresh mud, in which it seems to have recently rolled to remove the numerous insects that cling to its sides and neck. Both its ears are "gotched," as is often the case in the section of which we write.

The mule occupies a central position in our scene, which is framed in the beautiful and luxuriant vines and flora of the South-west;

through which dart golden arrows of sunlight, as old Sol descends in his glory below the distant plains.

The animal is standing near the ashes of a fire, long since extinguished, and amid a variety of cooking utensils, some of which had been kicked beyond all chance of future usefulness. A saddle and a kiack lay near at hand, showing signs of recent use, and numerous bags of provisions, together with a side of bacon, hung from a tree near by.

Just now the mule seems to be bent on breaking up housekeeping, for the camp is in great confusion.

A sudden swishing of brush near the river betrays the approach of something; and a man seated upon a large half-breed horse, soon breaks through the screen of boughs and vines in the rear of the mule.

Still the animal goes on feeding. It has evidently arrived at the age, or passed through that experience incident to the use to which it has been put, that causes it to scorn all fear of anything on the earth, or in the waters under the earth.

"Dog-gone a gotch-eared mule!"

The speaker was a man of powerful frame, with deep chest and muscular arms and limbs. He was dressed in greasy buckskins, much torn; and with a dark blue woolen shirt, open at the neck, completing his outfit in the way of clothing, unless we add an old sombrero that sat in a slouchy way on the back of his head. In his belt he carried a brace of Colt's navy revolvers and a long bowie knife.

A Sharp's rifle and a lariat hung from his saddle-horn; while, with a canteen and a closely rolled serape, were securely fastened in his rear a brace of turkeys.

From the general appearance of this personage, one might suppose him to be a hard character, but one look into his blue eyes, so honest in their expression, would cause a speedy change of opinion.

The man is none other than Big Foot Wallace, the scout whom we last saw in the Alamo City, on the occasion of the disturbance at Bull's Head.

"Dog-gone a gotch-eared mule!" repeated Big Foot, as he slowly dismounted; his words showing that the comical side of the scene was appreciated.

"I allers said hit, an' I'll stick ter hit. Any mule are bad enough in dispersion an' looks. Fer simon pure, b'iled down cussedness, ther mule lays over all other animals: but a gotch-eared mule, with his carkiss kivered with ole he wood-ticks are ther ugliest lookin' thing what ever kicked. I'll sw'ar thot on Davy Crockett's grave. I hates ter wallop sich a low-born cantankerous critter. I allers used yer well, since I picked yer up on ther 'Pache trail six moons ago. I hes tried ter get shed o' yer every way; but yer allers comes back ug'in, lookin' es innercent es a lost orphin, er ther prodergal son what I used ter read about. But now yer hes got ter take a drubbin' fer smashin' ther camp tricks out o' cussedness."

So saying, Big Foot began to prepare a stick for the purpose he had in view, when suddenly glancing toward the spot where the mule had been standing, he saw that it had disappeared, and in its place was a man. A man, undoubtedly, though but dimly outlined in the gathering gloom and the deep shades.

As the scout leveled his pistol the stranger's hand was raised, with the palm toward him—a sign of brotherhood and peace at all times on the prairie.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat! Are thet you, Ben Thompson? Look yere, did yer swaller my mule, or hev ther cuss evaporated? How did yer git hyer? Whar's aner other boys?"

"They are all right. They'll be on deck soon, and we are all nearly famished. I'm as hungry as a coyote, and could put away half a side of buffalo."

"Good enough, Ben. I'll hustle around an' put things in shape. Ther pesky mule hev kinder knocked ther camp upside down. I wish ter thunder ther lightning would strike ther dang'd critter; but I sw'ar I don't reckon ther cuss would wink ef it did. I'll git even with her yit, Diablo, or I hopes ter be sculpted by a seven-year-old squaw!"

In five minutes the old scout had a camp-fire blazing, and the turkeys and bacon in a fair way of soon being in a condition to tempt the appetite.

"Are ther New Yorker comin' with Joe?" he asked.

"You're right he is. He's game to the backbone. The Irishman who drove his team up is coming too."

By the time the turkeys were well browned a brace of horsemen galloped from the northward, and Big Foot waved his sombrero and gave a welcoming yell.

"Lord Wallace," said reckless Joe, as he dismounted, "I thank the gods that I am once more permitted to gaze upon thy right royal form. King of the Post-oaks, I swear eternal loyalty to you—as long as you feed me well. But methinks those pigmy birds will not allay the torturing hunger that racks me frame; we need something that will stay by us after our long ride over the torrid prairies. What say you, me lord? Shall Diablo be stewed or broiled? Or do you think he'll kick against all attempts to put him to a useful purpose?"

"Joe, dog-gone yer skim-milk pictur'," said the scout, "I'm es glad ter see yer as ter strike a clear spring on ther Staked Plains arter a day's ride. As ter Diablo, he hev 'bout bu'sted up my leetle outfit ter-day. Mr. Carrolton, I'm right full o' smile ter see yer ag'in. Stake yer horses an' I'll fly 'round an' git yer grub ready."

The boys threw off the saddles and lariatied them out.

"Whar's yer Irisher, Mr. Carrolton?" asked Big Foot. "Ben tells me yer fetched him along."

"He is back on the trail a mile or so," was the reply. "Joe showed him the top of that dead oak as a guide, and we came on ahead. He is lame from so much riding, and has grumbled a good deal; but he has had cause for it, for we have spurred pretty deep since leaving the Medina. Patsey is a chronic grumbler, and as full of gab as a Yankee school-ma'am, and when we get tired of answering his questions, he will talk to his nag. I don't think he'll slay many Indians unless he gets a chance to talk them to death."

"We'll hev ter tie a coon-skin over his beef-trap, I reckon," said Big Foot; "er make him pard with Diablo. He kin gab thet mule all he wants ter."

"Where is the noble red-man, Turtle?" asked Joe. "We expected that we should find him with you."

"I can't say war ther chief are. He's liable ter drap in on us most any time. Boys, I reckon yer kin glide in on ther chaw. Them turk's is done ter a turn."

"Thanks, me lord," replied Joe. "Carrolton, pitch in. Here's a feast for you, thanks to Big Foot."

All hands seated themselves to a tempting supper. Reckless Joe, notwithstanding his fears as to the scanty supply of rations, was forced to admit, after a time, that his appetite was gone; and, picking his teeth with his bowie, he lay back against his saddle, saying:

"Gentlemen, a king never feasted upon more luscious or better cooked food. Carrolton, upon such fare as we will give you from the bottom-lands, plains, and streams of Texas, you will be as fat and sleek as a Dutch landlord when you return to Gotham."

"If this is a specimen bill-of-fare, I can readily believe you," returned the New Yorker.

"This hain't nuthin'," put in Big Foot; "'tain't nuthin' ter what are layin' round loose. Cutfish an' soft-shell turtles are es thick in ther Frio es wood-ticks on Diablo's neck; an' deer an' antelope an' sich small game keeps a-winkin' at yer ter shoot 'em, all day long, clean from this ter Fort Clarke. Hit's a blessed fact. But, look hyer, boys; hit's a-gittin mighty strange ther Irisher ner Diablo, nary one on 'em doesn't kinder show up. Dog-goned ef hit hain't. Whar did yer say yer picked him up, Carrolton?"

"Who? Patsey, do you mean? I found the poor fellow wandering around in Indianola, without a cent," answered the New Yorker; "and I took pity on him, and thought I'd give him a chance to get out of that God-forsaken hole. But really, I am getting a little worried on his account." And Carrolton arose, and looked out on the plain; but the fast-falling shades of night prevented his seeing any great distance.

"Don't fret, boys," exclaimed Reckless Joe. "It don't do to get to worrying too soon after eating. It spoils digestion. Besides, an Irishman is like a cat; just as hard to kill, or more so, and always comes out of every scrape on his feet. In fact, I believe his lower appendages are the strongest part of him. No sar-

castic insinuations in my remark intended to apply to your pedals, me lord Mitchell; so don't scowl. Let the world wag, Carrolton. It will continue to roll on through limitless space, even if our friend, the exile from Erin, is lost."

"Joe, don't commence on your highfalutin' lingo," appealed the old scout. "Ef yer gits started, we sha'n't sleep a wink ter-night, an' yer'll skeer ther game away, ter say nothin' o' drawin' ther reds down on us. Hit's what yer more'n liable ter do, one o' these times, when yer slings 'Nited States so strong. Whar—"

Big Foot was here interrupted by a long and piercing scream, followed by a blood-curdling yell of mortal fear, that brought every man around the camp-fire to his feet, each looking at his neighbor in questioning amazement.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ABDUCTION.

At the time when Monte Mose was in the employ of the Quartermaster's Department, and moved in the higher circles of San Antonio society, he had, at a private danza, been introduced to Celeste Martinez, a beautiful girl who belonged to one of the oldest and most aristocratic Castilian families in the Alamo City.

From the first meeting of these young people they became enamored with each other; and the time soon came when the fair young girl passed no happy hour except in the presence of the gifted and handsome American. At that time he was known by the name of Louis Mosby; a name that soon became lost to him, through low associations and habits.

The parents of Celeste, having the blood of Old Spain in their veins, and being proud of their spotless family record, were from the first averse to their daughter's receiving the attentions of a man who, by his own confession, knew nothing whatever in regard to himself or his origin.

The man who had, in his rough way, been a father to the young Mosby, had upon his death-bed informed him that he was in no way connected with him by ties of blood; but, to the last, he had refused to impart any knowledge to the youth which might enable him to discover his parents. Toward the last he seemed to have repented of this, for when the hand of death had paralyzed his tongue he grasped the boy by the arm and signed to him to remove his coat and to lay bare his right arm. When this was done he pointed to a peculiar mark in India ink, and which Louis had often inspected with curiosity.

This indicated that the dying man wished him to know that by this mark he might yet ascertain who his parents were, and since that time he had lived in hopes of some day learning more in regard to them.

All this he had told to Don and Donna Martinez, and in consequence of this they had felt kindly toward him and allowed him the freedom of their casa. But, when they saw that their only and idolized daughter was deeply in love with the young American they forbade him to enter their doors. The knowledge that he was a nameless nobody had up to this time given him but little concern; but taken in connection with this, it had driven him to the weak act of seeking to drown his troubles in alcohol.

This question of birth did not in the least affect Celeste; indeed, at the first, she seemed willing to brave the anger of her parents and the sneers of her friends, rather than give up the man she loved. But poor Mose, as he now began to be called, went on from bad to worse.

Twice had he been discharged from the Department, and as often taken back; and each time he had resolved to conquer his appetite for drink, Celeste promising him her hand at the end of a year should he keep his pledge. But it was no use. Back he drifted into the slums; and when one glass had passed his lips, he was lost to all his promises, and drowned his vows, his love and self-respect in the fiery liquor. It is needless to attempt any further description.

Words cannot depict the anguish that filled the soul of Celeste, as she saw her lover drift slowly away from her; and her feelings may be imagined when, after striving for many weary days to meet him, she at length caught sight of him one day, as he sat in the middle of the deserted Plaza, and acting in a strange and excited manner. Had she not seen him spring to his feet and aim with his revolver at some object that she knew must be conjured up in his whisky-crazed imagination, she

might have hastened to his side and again pleaded with him; but she realized that in the state he was in he would disgrace her in the eyes of the public, and her parents would be informed of the meeting. So she waited behind the wall until he had left the Plaza, watched him as he wrote the note of warning, and then following him in the crowd, saw him deliver it to the stranger.

Knowing that, habited as she was, she could not act the spy, and being determined to ascertain by what means Mose had procured the money which had enabled him to assume his present appearance, and also what connection he had with the stranger, Celeste hastened to her house, near at hand, resolved to disguise herself and brave the nameless street dangers of San Antonio.

Beautiful as a summer's dream was Celeste Martinez. Her eyes were large and lustrous, melting with love, or flashing with the uncontrollable passion of her ancestors—chivalrous knights of Old Castile.

She was of medium height and graceful carriage. Few of the many beauties of the Alamo City could claim half the admiration that was hers, as she circled in the mazy waltz.

Entering the Casa Martinez, and calling her maid Panchita, who was not only her confidante in her love secrets, but who assisted her all in her power in her present difficult position, Celeste, with her aid, disguised herself in male attire; her costume being a jacqueta and leggings of buckskin, with top-boots and a slouched sombrero.

Slipping a revolver into her red silk sash, which she bound around her waist, and concealing a stiletto in her bosom, she applied a liquid preparation to her face and hands, which gave them a reddish brown tint.

This done, she passed out by the rear door of the court-yard in the twilight, without being observed, and went hastily along in the direction of the Main Plaza.

It so happened that she arrived at the corner of the street which led to the Bull's Head, just as the disturbance took place between the Mexicans and the Texans.

Hurrying past the Market House, she saw the young man to whom Mose had given the note a short time previous; but, before she could attract his attention in any way, as she fully intended to do, he was pushed into the bar-room, and the fierce conflict speedily followed.

From behind a pillar of the market, she witnessed the release of Antonio from his terrible position on the door, and she glided after him, as Black Ben led him off.

Upon her arrival at the jacal, Celeste climbed carefully up it, and gained a position on the thatch, parting the dry reeds with her knife, and seeing and hearing all that passed between the bandit chief and his wounded confederate.

Later on, her anguish and despair may be imagined, when she witnessed the entrance of her lover, intoxicated.

Having heard the spy address the American as El Negro Bravo—the name of a notorious bandit—some idea may be formed of her poignant grief when she saw the man whom she loved more than life depart in such fearful company.

So utterly despairing was Celeste Martinez, when the conviction flashed upon her mind that Mose was now forever lost to her, that she fainted, and lay for some time on the roof of the jacal. At length she recovered, slipped to the ground, and in a half-dazed condition staggered toward the Military Plaza, revolving in her mind by what means she could hope to save her lover from the fiendish plottings of El Negro Bravo. Which was the best thing to be done? Undoubtedly to inform the city authorities of the discovery she had made; but then, by so doing, she might implicate and ruin Mose.

Greatly puzzled what to do, and filled with forebodings of coming evil, to which the past seemed as nothing, Celeste reached the middle of the Military Plaza, which was the least frequented square in San Antonio.

Halting at the foot of the broken flagstaff, where she had seen Mose sitting but a short time, the fair Castilian burst into tears, forced to think that her love and her life were wrecked forever. It was then that she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and before she could spring aside, the steed was upon her.

Celeste uttered a shriek of terror.

"Caramba!" burst from the rider, who was nearly thrown to the ground by the sudden

sheering of his mustang. A flash of light bursting into the girl's face showed her the brutal features of a Mestizo, who, as he spoke, knocked the sombrero from her head, causing her long hair to fall about her shoulders. This, together with her shriek, revealed her sex, and before she could scream for help, her hat was replaced, and she felt herself lifted from the earth. Then, for the second time that night, her senses left her.

When she recovered, the cool night wind was fanning her brow; but the violent motion, caused by the great speed of the mustang, too plainly told her the situation she was in.

She saw by the moonlight, as soon as her eyes became clear, that they were galloping over prairies, and that their course seemed to be toward the Medina.

On bounded the hardy mustang, its drunken master dashing his spurs deep into the animal's flanks, and causing the frenzied steed to spring madly with pain. On, on, until Celeste saw a dark line of timber, which she judged marked the course of the Rio Medina.

With a wild shout, the Mestizo raised his canteen to his lips and drank deep, then again he spurred forward.

Greatly to her joy, the last quick spring of the horse threw her backward, causing the buckskin saddle-strings which bound her to snap asunder, thus setting her free.

Inspecting her sash, she now found that her revolver was gone; but she breathed a prayer of thanks as she felt the hilt of her stiletto, which the half-breed had not discovered. A chill ran through her at the thought of killing a human being; but every scruple vanished from her mind as the drunken ruffian, turning in the saddle, cried out:

"Viva El Negro Bravo!"

Then he threw his arms about her and attempted to draw her face toward his. A smothered scream burst from Celeste, as her right arm was drawn quickly backward, and her stiletto flashed in the moonlight.

The next instant it was buried to the hilt in the side of the Mestizo!

He gave one fearful yell of agony, a series of convulsive tremors, then his arms flew upward, and the half-breed fell from the snorting steed to the prairie sod, there to gasp out his last foul breath alone.

Faint and sick with horror, Celeste crawled forward into the saddle, gathered the flying reins, and spoke kindly to the jaded and affrighted mustang.

Not knowing in what locality on the Rio Medina she was, but hoping to reach some ranch at no great distance, the young girl rode on in a hesitating manner, at times halting, for she was still apprehensive of danger, and nearly insane when she thought of the grief and concern of her parents when they discovered her absence.

At length the mustang broke through some mesquites into scattering post-oaks, and she saw, a short distance ahead, the picket boundary of a corral. As she urged the animal toward it, knowing that a ranch must be near, a number of horses within the inclosure came bounding from the opposite side as if frightened and then rushed back and forth in a frantic manner.

Guiding her mustang around the corral near the pickets, herself hidden from view, she gained a point where, filled with horror, she witnessed the murder of the old ranchero by Pedro and El Negro Bravo!

After the cowardly murder, and the robbery of the ranch, Celeste observed the two bandits depart and return presently with what appeared to be a dead body, and which they laid down by the corpse of the old ranchero, and then took their departure. Although the sight was horrible in the extreme, still the girl, by some inexplicable influence which seemed almost wholly to drown her natural repugnance and terror, felt in a sense drawn toward the scene of the assassination.

Securing her horse with a slack lariat to a post of the corral, thus allowing him to feed, she glided stealthily toward the path which led from the cabin, and carefully kept a line of trees between herself and the point at which the bandits had disappeared.

But a moment did it take for her to reach the tree behind which Pedro had awaited the coming of the doomed man. Then, with a creeping of flesh and curdling of blood, Celeste glanced around the trunk of the oak.

"Madre de Dios!"

These words broke from the pallid, trembling

lips of the Castilian maiden as she recognized the features of Monte Mose. Then she fell forward upon the sward, in a dead faint, her beautiful face also upturned in the moonlight; the trio representing a faithful picture of despair, degradation and death!

CHAPTER XIV.

LUDICROUS CONSEQUENCES.

"DOG-GONE my, half-sister's black cat!"

After listening a moment for a repetition of the cry that had brought the party around the camp-fire on the Frio to their feet, Big Foot broke out again:

"Blamed ef I didn't think at fust hit war an Injun's yell, but now I'll sw'ar on a stack of dictionaries hit war the Irisher. He's gut inter some scrape, sure es shootin'! Lay low, boys, an' I'll take a scoot down-stream." And the old scout darted into the timber, rifle in hand.

"Keep an eye on the nags, Carrolton," said Fighting Ben. "Come on, Joe, we'll see the old man through!" and the younger scouts followed him.

The moon had risen a short time previous, and was now casting a pale light through the upper portion of the timber, showing the gray, ghost-like masses of "old man's beard" as they slowly swayed, making up a weird scene above the Egyptian darkness beneath.

With the stealthy tread of a panther, Big Foot stole beneath the bottom timber, being guided more by instinct than by sight, and soon reached a bend of the river, where it swept to the south, thus allowing the moonlight to pierce through nearly to the water.

Knowing that he had now arrived in the vicinity whence the sound had proceeded, he moved more slowly, peering, as he went, into the deep shadows. His eyes soon detected what, even to him, was a strange and unaccountable object. A second look solved the mystery, and Big Foot was forced to cram his bullet-pouch into his mouth to keep from giving vent to his extreme mirth in a horse-laugh.

Directly ahead of his position was a huge rock, its top some six feet above the surrounding level, and upon it stood Diablo, his despised mule, in its usual indolent attitude, its head hanging listlessly, and its tail switching slowly.

At the base of the rock lay the Irishman, Patsey, who had evidently struck the river below, and had been following the stream up through the timber when he came opposite the strange spectacle, which so frightened him that he gave a loud shriek, fell from his horse in terror, and now lay amid the rank bottom-grass.

From the position of the Irishman, and also that which was occupied by the old scout, the mule could not be distinguished as a quadruped, the animal being directly facing them, thus showing its fore legs only.

Above Diablo was a natural archway of vines and drooping mosses, the animal standing beneath its center, outlined against the moonlit sky, and no doubt suggesting to Patsey's mind his own idea of Satan emerging from the entrance to his regions.

As Big Foot caught sight of the Irishman, he wormed his way around to enable him to get a full view of Patsey's face. No sooner had he gained a favorable position, than the Irishman raised his head slowly from the grass and turned his affrighted eyes upward; his features, ghastly before, now filled with horror and deadly fear, as he saw before him the same dread object, seemingly watching him as he lay, and its suggestive tail whisking about its diabolical form. Once more he buried his face, scarce able in his terror to articulate a prayer, while his trembling fingers attempted to make the sign of the cross.

At this moment Joe and Ben came up to the side of the old scout, both shaking with mirth.

"Go for Carrolton, Joe," ordered Big Foot, in a hoarse whisper. "He ortent ter miss sich a cirkus. I'm 'bout bu'stin' my gizzard with laugh."

Joe, with his hand over his mouth, hastened to camp for the New Yorker, while Ben Thompson, to carry on the play, worked his way carefully to the rear of Diablo, with a short club in his hand.

Patsey's horse, having more sense than its master, had left him in the lurch, and proceeded directly to join its mates near the camp.

Fighting Ben waited until he could see the

white faces of his pards showing against the dark background of underbrush, and then a strong and sudden blow on the hams of Diablo.

The mule was undoubtedly as near asleep as it was possible for it to be, under its weight of misery and woodticks; but it probably never before used its muscles with more velocity of action, never before was so suddenly and unexpectedly brought back from the suburbs of Nod to the stern realities of life, never before so badly frightened.

Diablo gave one wild snort, then a plunge which proved that the animal had forgotten where it had perched for a siesta, and rolled down the slanting side of the rock through the bushes at its base, in its mad career crashing over the prostrate Patsey, whose cries of horror filled the bottom timber.

The dread terror that had taken possession of the Irishman probably prevented him at the first from rising and running away; and Diablo, after the manner of his kind, landed on his feet directly astride of his recumbent figure, one hoof pressing the slack of his corduroys into the earth.

Whether Patsey's hands came in contact with Diablo's legs, or he in his mind decided that the weight and tangibility of the thing was strong proof against its being of supernatural origin, we know not; but, at this moment, with an unearthly whoop, he sprang upward, jerking Diablo off his balance, and both rolled over in the bushes, as if in fierce combat, the observers, greatly to their surprise, noticing that the mule had the shoulders of Patsey between its teeth, its eyes blazing with fury, and its long ears flopping in the face of its antagonist.

Over and over they rolled, man and mule, between the huge tree-trunks, which here, for the benefit of all concerned, were almost clear of underbrush, the bottom at this point shelving down to the verge of the river-bank, which was some fifteen feet above the water. The moon, at the time of Fighting Ben's rear attack upon Diablo, shone brightly, its light increasing and penetrating through the interstices of the trees in brilliant bars, enabling our friends to witness distinctly every movement, as Patsey and the mule, their limbs entwined, the stout fists of the Irishman falling with sounding whacks upon the ribs of the animal, rolled down the incline, each probably at a loss as to the character and kind of the other.

Human nature could not stand this very long.

"Five doubloons ag'in' a pewter picayune the mule wins!" roared Big Foot; but not even Ben offered to take the bet.

Suddenly all sprang to their feet, for they knew by the sounds of commotion that the combatants were near the river. Just in time did they peer through the bushes, to see the legs of Diablo beating the air and to hear an unearthly snort and yell blended in concert; then a far sounding splash struck their ears, as man and mule, close to each other, plunged into the dark waters of the Rio Frio!

"Can the Irishman swim?" asked Joe, quickly.

"Like a fish," answered Carrolton. "I have no fear for him."

"Then come on to camp, boys," said Joe. "He will make his way to us, guided by the twilight, and will never suppose that we know anything of his strange experience. We will have some fun getting him to explain it."

"I hope," said Carrolton, "that Patsey is not going to cause us trouble after we get into a more dangerous country."

"H'll pan out all hunk," was the quiet assurance of Big Foot.

"When, me Lord Wallace," inquired Reckless Joe, "shall we mount our noble steeds and bound over the wide, free prairies beneath the ardent kisses of the southern sun? When are we to meet the Bedouins of the American desert, the paint-daubed fiends of the Pecos, the denizens of the basaltic gorges of the Apache Mountains? 'Tis the corrugate of hate and detestation that shall nerve me arm when their war-cries fill the prairie air. Forward! Lead on to carnage, or I burst with pent-up rage! Lord Wallace, did we pick those turkey bones clean?"

"Yer must hev put hold of a rare piece ter make yer so bu'stin' blood-struck. Hit's that double barrel'd dose o' turk' what's swellin' yer up, I reckon. As ter our p'intin' out o' this camp, don't fret. Yer'll see all yer wants ter soon enough, an' hev 'bout all yer kin do ter keep yer sculp tight. A sculp like yourn ain't

common, an' are wuth close on ter forty mus-tangs 'mong ther 'Paches t'other side ther Pecos."

"I should judge," said Carrolton, begging pardon for changing the subject, "that Patsey has had sufficient time to crawl out of the river and reach the camp. Can he see the fire, do you think, from the other side of the stream?"

"Dead sure an' sartin he kin," answered the old scout. "Yer see, hit are a high'r bank on t'other side ther Frio, an' he can't help from gittin' a sight o' our blaze ef he glides upstream. Howsomever, he moughtn't know who we bees. Hit's little frontier he had in his head, an' Diablo hev knocked an rolled tht outen him. I'll bet four bits that I'll never git as good a coffee-pot ag'in es thet dang'd mule smashed. Dod rot him! I hopes he's broke his neck. Then, ag'in, I should miss him right smart, fer I hes a heap o' fun outen him, an' never gits lonesome when ther cuss are 'long o' me. Yer'll see him by mornin', standin' es docile an' innocent es a baby. Pards, we-uns must be ten miles from this camp 'fore sun up. How is yer 'bout standin' a yarly rise, Carrolton?"

"I shall be ready for the saddle after a few hours' sleep," answered the New Yorker. "Time will pass more pleasantly on the march, now that we have you along; and if we have your mule also for company, I anticipate the best kind of a good time when we get up the Rio Frio."

"Plenty of rough trials, and short grub and water sandwiched in, if we leave the vicinity of this stream, and don't you look for too much," put in Fighting Ben.

"Methinks I hear you speak of short grub, Ben," cried out Joe, his mouth full of turkey as he spoke; "but still you need not pick up a piece of second joint, when you can do so by stretching out an arm. There ain't no dressing nor cranberry sauce, but I don't find fault. This isn't Delmonico's or Crook's."

"Sish-h-h-h!" came quickly from Big-Foot Wallace, as he sprang up creek, gazing toward the river, and holding up his head as a sign for silence.

CHAPTER XV.

A FIGHT BY MOONLIGHT.

COLONEL WELLINGTON greatly excited and alarmed, urged his daughter toward the cabin, exclaiming:

"Flora, I know we are in great danger; for I fear that Turtle—who would have been a host in himself were he with us—is slain. He could hardly escape."

"Let us hope he will, papa; and come to our aid. He is a friend who has braved death for us before now."

"I pray that he may indeed escape the fiends," said the colonel. "Here we are, Flora. Be careful in crossing this tree bridge, my child. It pains my heart to have you in such peril as now threatens us."

"Do not worry about me, papa," said Flora, assuming a tone of indifference, as she hurried on toward the cabin.

As their feet stepped upon the veranda, the Mexican herder approached them, coming from his hut.

"Run to the corral, Augustine," ordered the colonel. "Saddle up my black horse, and Miss Flora's pony. Lead them into the timber near your hut, and lariat them to a tree. Be lively now, my man!"

The Mexican's face was filled with surprise at the unexpected order, and had he been closely watched he would have been seen to tremble and turn pale with fear; for he had inspected the plain toward San Antonio, and saw no signs of the "Chaparral Cocks," besides he now knew that the dreaded foe was approaching from the south side of the Frio, and that therefore they could not be his friends.

"Now," said the old gentlemen, "we must begin to make preparations for defending our home and our lives. The end of the cabin which you occupy is the most secure, and there is a rear entrance which we might use, if we are attacked in front, and overpowered."

"I will close the shutters, and light up, papa; for it is getting dark. Strange to say, I feel safe when we are in-doors. The walls you know, are bullet-proof."

"I am afraid, my dear, you do not realize how merciless and inhuman are the foes whom we dread."

"Indeed I do," was the reply, as she pushed the bolts and bars into place. "I know the

danger we are in, but I cannot think Turtle will be killed; and, if he does escape, I know that he will hasten to our assistance. Besides, papa, if I should allow myself to go into hysterics, it would only make matters that much worse."

"You are the most sensible girl in the Lone Star State, I do believe," said the colonel, as he gathered up his arms and ammunition ready for instant use.

"Oh, papa Wellington! we have forgotten Huld and Pic."

"Bless my soul! I had really forgotten the poor things. Call them, Flora; but do not explain the danger that hangs over us. Augustine, is that you?"

"Si, senor!"

Flora stepped to the rear door, and called the negroes.

Aunt Huld, with great speed and surprise, entered the cabin.

"Where is Picayune?" asked the colonel.

"I hasn't see'd Pic, sence long before sundown," answered Huld, her face showing fear and astonishment.

"Come in and sit down, Aunt Huld," ordered her master; "but don't ask any questions, or you'll bother us. Flora," he continued, as he wiped out a rifle, "step to the door, and look for the boy in front. I reckon he hasn't gotten over his fright. Augustine, bar the back door, and keep a keen watch from the loop-hole."

In answer to Flora's call, a deep tremulous groan proceeded from beneath the floor of the veranda.

"Come out, Pic! Come quick. We are going to bar the door."

Like a rabbit from its burrow, crawled the little negro, trembling with fear, as he glanced toward the woods.

Both mother and son gazed in wonder at the movements of their master and young mistress, who were going from one loop hole to another, and looking out into the night.

"Gor Amity! Marso Will—"

"Hush h-h!" said the colonel, with an imperative gesture; and Huld, clasping Pic's hand, stood silent, with a look of terror upon her large round face.

Augustine took his position at the loop hole in the back door; one of several, which had been cut for the purpose when the house was built.

As time passed, the old colonel became more composed, and grasped his rifle with the firmness of former days. Now and then, Flora would come to his side, and whisper, in her loving way, words of cheer.

It was a striking scene. Colonel Wellington was keeping watch in front, Augustine in the rear, and Flora to the west; Aunt Huld, seated in one corner, and clinging to Picayune, a comical picture of the most abject terror. Thus passed some time, during which the negroes, fatigued with the labors of the day, forgot their fears in sleep. At length the colonel exclaimed, hurriedly:

"God protect us! Here they come!"

As he spoke, he thrust his rifle out of the loop hole, and glanced along the sights. Flora, looking out, cried:

"Hold, papa! For your life, hold! It is Turtle!"

"Thank Heaven, you spoke in time!" said the old gentleman in a hoarse voice, as he drew in his rifle. "Your eyesight is better than mine, I admit, Flora; but if that is the Tonkaway chief, I must say he is changed wonderfully. Where are his eagle-feathers? However, he is holding out his hands in token of friendship and peace, and you must be right in regard to his identity, as we know no other friendly Indian. I hope and trust that it is he, and shall thank God if he has indeed escaped after his self-sacrificing act."

The Tonkaway, for it was he, now stepped into the opening from the timber, and approached the cabin with the stride peculiar to his people.

"Come in, Turtle!" said Flora, unbarring the door. "I knew I could not mistake your form and motion."

"Is it indeed you, chief?" said the colonel, grasping the hand of the brave Indian. "I came near shooting you. What is the matter? Where is your head-ires? It is dangerous for you to change your appearance. Had not Flora recognized you, I should have fired; and you know I seldom make a miss."

"I should know Turtle," said Flora, "I do believe, among a thousand of his tribe. But,

tell us," she continued; "are the Comanche coming? Are we in danger?"

"Yes; tell us all! Hide nothing, chief," said the colonel.

"How white friends know Comanche on Frio?" asked the Tonkaway, as he glanced from one to the other.

"Pie saw them. He told us, and we crossed the river," answered our heroine. "Papa and myself saw you when you nobly risked your life to entice them from their course, and prevent them from camping near us."

"How Flower of Frio know Turtle? He many shots off on plain," said the chief meekly, but with a look of wonder and incredulity in his dark eyes.

"We had our spy-glass," she said, pointing to it.

Turtle gave a guttural grunt of relief and satisfaction. He had known that it was impossible for his friends to recognize him, at that distance, with the naked eye.

"Long eye heap good," said the Tonkaway. "But how," asked Flora, "did you escape those fiends? We saw them nearly overtake you, and heard you shoot."

"Turtle is a Tonkaway chief," asserted the Indian, proudly. "Comanches are squaws. No time talk. War-party up river. See ranch when sun come. Then hear war-cry. Hear death yell. Turtle ride fast down Frio. Find white scouts. Find Big Foot chief. Come back quick. Save Flower of Frio. Maybe save ranch."

Quietly and rapidly the Tonkaway decorated his breast again with the turtle, and striped his face with the war paint of his tribe; the colonel and his daughter watching him the while, as though he had been some superior being. Huddy and Pie had slept on through the entire conversation. Augustine dared not look at the Tonkaway, whose eagle eye he feared to meet.

Now that the Mexican knew that the Comanches were in the vicinity of the ranch, and that he would be forced to fight, and perhaps lose his life in the defense of those whom he would gladly murder himself, his curses were deep, though not loud. But he knew that certain death would follow any discovery that would implicate him with the proposed raid by the "Chaparral Cocks," and he controlled himself by a powerful effort. He resolved now to escape, and ride toward the rendezvous of the gang, on the Rio San Miguel.

"Turtle shoot eagle one moon ago. Where feathers? Chief tell Flower of Frio keep," spoke the Indian suddenly, as he finished putting on his war-stripes.

"Oh, yes!" replied Flora. "I remember. I was thinking you did not look natural yet. I will get them."

She soon procured the desired ornaments, which the chief fastened in his head by a buckskin fillet.

"How came you to be so changed, Turtle?" asked Colonel Wellington, still somewhat mystified.

"Dress dead Comanche like Tonkaway. Put on war-paint. Put on feathers. Comanches big fools. Crawl in bush when hear Tonkaway war-cry."

As the chief spoke, he tightened his belt, grasped the hands of his white friends, and as he stepped on the veranda, paused a moment to give his parting counsel.

"White-Hair Chief keep eye open. Turtle bring scout. Flower of Frio's scalp no hang on Comanche belt. Turtle has spoken. His words are no wind."

Then, with a wave of his hand, the Indian ran along the clearing in the direction of the river.

The moon now rode high in the heavens, illuminating the lawn between the cabin and the wood; and, barring the door, the colonel and Flora again took their stations, their hearts filled with gratitude, and with deep regard for their red friend and ally.

As Flora Wellington looked out from the front of the cabin, to gaze after the now disappearing form of the chief, upon whose future movements, the lives of the household perhaps depended, she saw him approach the edge of the timber, saw his form for an instant standing erect, then quickly fall to the earth, as an arrow cut the air, flying across the opening, striking and quivering in one of the veranda posts.

While our friends now watched, filled with alarm, they saw a painted savage spring madly from the bush with upraised knife and ex-

ultant manner, and bound to the spot where the Tonkaway had fallen.

Flora uttered a cry, and thrust her rifle from the loop-hole, but quickly drew it back, as her guardian exclaimed:

"Don't shoot, Flora! You will kill our red friend!"

Again our heroine peeped out, just in time to see Turtle rise from the ground, spring upon his foe, and with bright steel flashing in the moonlight, they both grappled, writhing and struggling in fierce combat upon the flower-decked sward.

The watchers saw the twisting forms roll toward the cabin, saw their arms and limbs strained and nerved to superhuman exertion; while the clash of steel sounded in their ears, sending a chill to their hearts.

For a moment only did the fierce fight rage. Then a spurt of blood shot upward into the moonlight, as the knife of the Tonkaway chief was thrust into the breast of his panting foe.

Rising hastily, and resting on his knees, the Tonkaway again elevated his dripping blade in the air, and brought down his arm, plunging the steel, with sickening sound through flesh and bone.

A feeble, half-smothered death-howl broke from the doomed brave as, with quick movement, Turtle drew his knife-blade around the head of his conquered enemy, and tore off the much-prized trophy of his people.

Springing erect the chief now faced the cabin circled the knife and scalp in triumph above his proud poised head; then the war-cry of his tribe burst from his lips in low, vengeful exultation, as he whirled about and ran quickly across the opening, disappearing beneath the timber of the Rio Frio.

With long-drawn sighs of relief, the colonel and his daughter drew away from the loop-holes at which they had been standing, and gazed at each other in horror.

Seeing a questioning look in the young girl's eyes, the old man said in a low and guarded tone:

"Thank Heaven! Our friend is the victor. That was a Comanche spy from the camp of the war-party."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed our heroine, greatly excited, and relapsing again into dread alarm after witnessing the fearful combat. "Why did Turtle leave us? Are there not more of those fierce, inhuman monsters lurking in the bottom, ready to steal in upon us?"

"I do not think the chief would have left us had he thought that we were threatened with immediate danger. He doubtless knows, my dear child, all the habits and usages of these Comanches when on the war-path, and we must abide by his judgment. Beyond a doubt he will scour the woods in the vicinity, and perhaps circle the ranch, before he departs for help. Be assured he would not leave us unless there was a necessity for his so doing; and that leads me to suppose that he knows we could not stand a charge or hold our own against those bloodthirsty fiends. Let us watch and trust that succor may reach us. May our Heavenly Father guard you, whatever may befall me!"

"Oh, do not talk in that manner, papa, or I shall not be able to control myself! Don't you think it would be better for us to mount our horses and gallop toward the settlements? There is one chance that way."

"Perhaps it would be well for you to do so, Flora," replied the colonel, reflectively. "What do you say, my daughter? Would you fear to trust yourself to Augustine?"

As the old gentleman pronounced the name of the Mexican, Flora glanced quickly toward the rear door, and caught the glad, exultant expression which spread over the Greaser's face as he heard his employer's suggestion.

This decided her. With a shudder she cried out:

"Do not ask me to leave you, papa Wellington. If we are doomed to die, let us at least die together!"

"Do not be despondent, my darling," said the old gentleman, in a reassuring voice, although even now a spasm of mental agony convulsed him. "I would not have a moment's peace of mind were you to go, fearing that you might fall into some danger, and I not be at hand to protect you. The night is drawing on, and I trust we shall ere long see the gallant scouts, with Turtle at their head, gallop to our assistance, and then we can laugh at the murderous Comanches."

"How far do you suppose Turtle will be obliged to ride before he reaches the camp of the scouts he expects to lead to our aid? and how does he know they are encamped on the Frio at this time?"

"I cannot answer your questions, my dear. I suppose the Tonkaway chief must have been in the camp of the scouts, or else he knows in some way that they are to be at a certain point below us to-night. He knows every bush and bend of the Rio Frio, and the movements of all the Rangers and musangers between here and the Nueces. He was in such a hurry when here that I did not like to question him. It is much to be regretted that Clarence Carrolton did not arrive in time to lend a helping hand in defending our home. Keep a sharp look-out, my daughter, while I remove the body of that Comanche. It might attract notice from any lurking savages, who would then be, if possible, more determined to take our lives."

CHAPTER XVI.

PATSEY ON HIS MUSCLE.

As the old scout rose to his feet the sound was explained by the appearance of the Irishman, to the astonishment of all, mounted on the back of Diablo.

Both man and mule presented a most dejected appearance, to say the least. Patsey, with both arms, had grasped Diablo's neck at the base of the ears, his feet being drawn up over the beast's hams. The mule came out from the timber with a short and hesitating step; his movements showing plainly that he was not only conscious of being over-packed, but that he was aware that the character of his burden was strange and beyond his strength.

When this peculiar pair emerged from the bushes the mule came to a halt, its vision, no doubt, as was that of its rider, blurred by the light of the fire.

Patsey straightened up, allowing his feet to fall upon the sward, and pressed his hands backward over his head, forcing the water from his hair. He then rubbed vigorously upon his eyes. Previous to this, at a signal from Big Foot, all fell prone upon their faces, screened from view by the long grass.

"Thunder and turf!"

Patsey's eyes being freed from water and accustomed to the firelight, were now filled with alarm and astonishment to see the camp in perfect order and not a human being within view.

"Begorra, but ye're a dacent, sinsible baste, if ye were afther givin' Patsey O'Horan sich a divil of a scare! Faix, ye were afther draggin' me out of the river, or the divil a bit of me way I'd found; an' now ye stop when ye see there's no one beyant the fire. St. Patrick be betwane me an' harum! Upon me soul, instid of thinkin' that this same is God's country, as the b'ys is afther sayin', it lucks as if the divil had the run of things. It's a fool I was not to kape up wid them."

Here the mule gave a vigorous kick with both hind legs, which threw the Irishman upon the animal's neck.

"Och, blood an' nunkers! What does yees mean? Shure I'll niver spake a word ag'in' yees afther this. Don't I know ye're as dacent an' as purty a baste as iver stood on four feet? Kape cool thin, for how does ye know but what the red haythens made the fire beyant, an' are afther hidin' in the bush till they get a chance for our scalps, be the powers?"

"Holy poker!" he continued, looking around him in all directions, "what strange notions fills a man's head with botheration, an' thin away they flies, the divil knows where!"

Just then Reckless Joe turned a series of hand-springs, and then sunk again on the grass, followed by Ben and Clarence, one after the other, and all tumbling in the direction of Patsey. The movements were so rapid, and the young men sunk from sight so quickly, that it would have puzzled any one to have decided as to the character of the strange objects in the dim firelight.

The Irishman stood, perfectly chilled with terror for the moment; however, having been so often frightened during the last two hours, he now became desperate. Whirling his shillelah over his head, and with a wild hurrah, he sprang upward, knocking his heels together in a bantering way, as he yelled:

"Come on out o' that, ye divils, ye! The curse o' Cromwell on yees, whatever ye is! Sure it's Patsey O'Horan that never expicts

till see mornin', but he's the b'y that'll die wid his shtick in his fist!"

With another wild cry the poor fellow sprung madly into the grass, whacking away on all sides of him.

Luckily his tormentors had prudently crawled back to the vicinity of the camp-fire, when they saw that the Irishman was preparing for his furious charge.

Beating the grass, his stick flying in every direction, while his eyes bulged out with a dread expectation of he knew not what, poor Patsey sprung this way and that, dreading the hideous sight that might meet his gaze at every turn. The situation was too ridiculous for the boys any longer to control themselves. They arose to their feet, revealing themselves to the bewildered Hibernian, who, panting with exertion, lowered his stick and stood motionless in his tracks.

"Be the piper of Balinaback!" he exclaimed. "But it's the foine counthry yees has brought me intil, Misther Carrolton! Sure I've seen more divils the night than would rache from hell till Connaught, savin' yer presence; but I'm the b'y that flured the last wan o' thim, an' sint thim away, sure I did, wid a flag in their ears; barrin' one, bad 'cess till him! B'ys, were yees afther seein' an animal wid big ears hung on hinges? Och, but he was the quare baste for thricks! He was that, upon me sowl!"

"Where have you been all this time?" inquired Clarence, as soon as he could control his risibles. "Why did you not follow me to camp? And what have you done with your horse? Come, give an account of yourself."

"Sure, thin, I tuck a bit of a scoot, as Misther Joe calls it," said Patsey, as he advanced to the fire and wrung out the water from the loose parts of his clothing; "me horse, is it? Faix, ye has the best o' me there, as Mick's pig said whin the ould man put a rope on him till dhrag him till market. Upon me sowl, I don't know where I left him. Things has been in sich a hullabaloo that I c'u'dn't take me oath that I'm Patsey O'Horan. It's the fool I was that I didn't stick close wid yees; but it's remember what I've come through I'll do till me dyin' day, no less!"

"Pards," said Big Foot, "I wasn't reckonin' on thet gotch-eared, scrofulus varmint cuttin' up sich a cirkus. We hes hed some ginawine b'iled down fun, an' a heap o' noise counted in. We can stand hit this onct, but arter ter-night sich a jamboree would be dangerous; an' es we-uns hes ter glide outen this afore sun-up, I reckon a siester comes in on ther bill 'bout now. Hain't yer hed screechin', an' howlin', an' caterwaulin' enough, you Irisher, ter last yer one while?"

"Troth, an' I have that, sor! I feel as if I had bin wrastlin' at Donnybrook fair, an' the b'ys had bin playin' the Devil's Dhrame wid their shillelahs on every bone in me body. An' I'm wake wid me long fastin'!"

"Kick ther kiver offen that oven, Patsey," directed the old scout. "I reckon yer'll find somethin' nourishin', ef Joe hain't gobbled all ther turk."

"What's that, me lord Wallace?" exclaimed Reckless Joe, as he spread his blankets and assumed an air of virtuous indignation. "Dost think me so wanting in the characteristics of a gentleman, such a slave to me appetite, that I would devour the last of your edibles, knowing that yonder representative from Erin-go-Bragh had not yet broken his fast? Methought, namesake of Scotland's hero, that thou didst know me better than to insinuate such unmanly manners to me."

"Dog-gone yer, Joe! Hobble yer tongue, or yer'll spile my sleep! Thar ain't no use a-standin' guard, I reckon, ef yer all fotch ther nags inside camp."

Carrolton and Ben led the horses near the camp fire, and secured the animals by picket-pins; they then stretched out comfortably upon their blankets.

Big Foot lay listening to the the sounds of the night, soon observing that the energetic movements of Patsey's jaws, as well as Joe's tongue, had ceased. Looking again at the Irishman, the old scout saw that his eyes were directed toward the river, expressing at the same time surprise and terror.

Following the direction of Patsey's gaze, the old scout saw Diablo standing in his old position, which the irrepressible mule had gained without even a rustle of the branches, or a swish of the grass.

With a low chuckle, Big Foot rolled over,

and pulled the blankets around him; but, the next instant, he sprung to his feet, and yelled aloud.

A singularly piercing scream, sounding from a little distance, brought every man from his recumbent position, and then, a horseman came galloping into camp, halting his mustang near them. It was an Indian, in full paint and feathers.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat! Boys, something's gone wrong up river. Turtle, spit out your news, won't yer? What's in ther wind now?"

"Turtle ride fast," was the breathless reply. "Come from Wellington Ranch. Comanches thick on Rio Frio. Shoot gun at ranch. Comanche hear in camp. White hair chief say come quick. Flower of Frio she say ride fast. Come!"

"Saddle up, boys, as quick as God will let you!" yelled Big Foot. "Tonkaway, change yer saddle; thar's an extry boss. Joe, Ben, all 'o yer, look alive!"

Turtle, the Tonkaway, quickly changed his saddle, and by that time all were ready, armed and equipped for the march. Not a word had been spoken among themselves; all realizing, from the manner and speech of the chief, that it was a question of life and death, and that their movements must decide it.

In less than a minute all were mounted and ready to drive spurs to their steeds, when Carrolton happened to observe Patsey, who was standing, open-mouthed, staring at the Indian in wonder and dread.

"Big Foot, what is to be done with the Irishman?" asked the New Yorker, in a hurried voice.

"Pack ther mule, an' follow ther river up fer about twenty mile, Patsey; an' we'll be on ther look-out fer yer, like es not!"

Giving these final instructions, the old scout added:

"For'ard, pards, an' don't spar' spurs!" and away galloped the scouts, with the eagle-feathers of Turtle, the Tonkaway, flaunting in their front. Away, over the plain toward the west, leaving the startled Irishman and the impassive Diablo sole occupants of the wild-wood camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

EL NEGRO BRAVO.

For some moments Celeste Martinez remained unconscious on the ground, near the murdered ranchero and her stupefied lover. The unusual and violent exercise had told upon the tenderly nurtured girl; and when she slowly recovered, and felt that she was in the open air, she was for a time bewildered.

Gazing around her in extreme surprise, as the fearful scene, which had so late been photographed upon her brain, was again portrayed before her, with its dread silent figure so near, she trembled in horror, while tears of anguish burst from beneath her long lashes, and ran down her cheeks.

Slowly quivering, as if in an ague fit, Celeste crawled toward the still form of Monte Mose. She felt that, if she were to find him dead, life would henceforth be a curse to her.

She paid no heed, scarce felt any remaining horror, as she passed the corpse of the murdered man; indeed, she felt unconscious of its presence; and soon gained the side of him who, with all his faults, was all the world to her.

Nervously, and as if she wished the ordeal over, Celeste tore open the collar of his shirt, and laid her hand upon his breast. There seemed, at first, to be no pulsation, and her hopes sunk; but soon she felt the heart beat feebly, and placing her hand upon his lips, she perceived a faint, slow breathing.

"Gracias a Dios!" she whispered, in deep and sincere meaning, as she turned her eyes reverently heavenward. She now knew that the young man was totally unconscious of his surroundings through drink; as, in fact, she had on more than one occasion previously, known him to be nearer dead than alive from the same cause. She could see no indications of his having been wounded; but, to her horror, she discovered a blood-stained knife clutched in his right hand.

Like a flash the words of Black Ben darted through her brain. She remembered the threat he had uttered: that he would cause the wretched youth to hate himself even more than he did; and she now understood their dread import.

El Negro Bravo had furnished the funis to poor Mose, knowing that he would get intoxi-

cated, and had formed the plot to inveigle him into his band. The fact that, though under the influence of liquor, Mose had returned the borrowed gold, proved that he still had too fine a sense of honor to enlist in any criminal gang; and the bandit chief, upon digesting this in his mind, had conceived the present fiendish plan of bending him to his wishes, and putting him, as it were, under his thumb.

El Negro Bravo had intended to make his dupe think himself a murderer, outlawed forever from his friends, and thus to secure him as a member of his band of cut-throats.

Celeste now reasoned that she could be of no use to her lover while he remained in his present intoxicated state. It was while hesitating what was next to be done, that she heard a sound of laughter from the point at which she had seen the murderers disappear. Knowing that she was lost if discovered, the affrighted girl sprung like a wild doe back to the place where she had left her mustang.

From her position she could now observe all the movements of the outlaws, without herself being seen.

She reached the shelter of the corral pickets just in time; for, as she peeped between the oaken posts, she saw three men approach the path, who, as they entered the moonlit space, she recognized as the chief, with his accomplice in the murder, and the man Antonio.

"There he lies, boys," said El Negro Bravo. "Don't he look innocent and unconcerned, after committing a cowardly murder? I tell you he's a tough coon!" And the wretch laughed loud and long, while smiles of fiendish satisfaction rested on the faces of the two Greasers.

"Senor Monte Mose will not dare to walk the Plazas of San Antonio again," said Pedro, with a grin.

"You're right," said Black Ben. "He's in the same box with Antonio, although not so well marked."

"We have the senor corraled," said the latter, with an ugly scowl on his features; "and it will be strange if he too is not well marked if he associates with El Negro Bravo."

"Your wounds make you a trifle sensitive, Antonio," said the bandit chief. "Your words are just a little too sarcastic. I would advise you to give your tongue a rest until you meet Senor Carrolton. You have got yourself in such a fix that you are of no use at present; so don't be over-presuming in your language and manner, or we who have whole skins may leave you in the lurch. You are too full of grumble, old boy."

Then, turning to his other follower, Black Ben added:

"Pedro, get a canteen of water! We must cool Mose off a little, for it will not do for daylight to find us in this vicinity. Antonio, are you sure that you told all our boys in San Antonio to meet us at the motte to-morrow?"

"Si, Senor! I told Juan to tell the others, and he is not one to forget. They were all at the Bull's Head."

"Good! I would not have them fail; for Carrolton will start directly for Wellington Ranch, and he must find the nest empty. We shall be there somewhat ahead of him."

"El Negro Bravo is mistaken," said Antonio, a look of pain and rage upon his dark face. "Senor Carrolton will find a wolf in the nest, who has sharp teeth, and can use them."

"Ah, ha! Then you intend to stop behind for a chance at the New Yorker?" asked the bandit chief.

"Senor Ben has guessed right," returned the Mexican. "Antonio cannot sleep until his knife has split his heart!"

"All right, old boy! I'll give you all the show you want: but look out you don't botch the job again," said his leader.

Pedro now approached from the river with the canteen of water. The bandit chief took another canteen, which contained muscal, from the neck of Antonio; this he secured about the waist of Mose, whom he now dragged nearer to the tree, leaving his body in an inclined position, the feet downward, and touching the corpse of the ill-starred ranchero.

"Get behind the trees, muchachos!" said El Negro Bravo; "I will now give him a little cold water treatment."

The Mexicans retired as directed, and the bandit chief placed the nozzle of the canteen between the collar of Mose's shirt and the flesh, in such a position as to allow the water to run out easily. This done, he also sprung to shelter.

The gurgle of the water was plainly heard by all the watchers, Celeste included. For a moment Mose writhed on the sward. He then arose to a sitting posture, and rubbed his eyes with an air of extreme bewilderment.

As he felt around in a trembling manner, his hand came in contact with the canteen about his neck, it being the first thing of which he seemed to comprehend the use. Raising it to his lips he took a deep draught, with evident satisfaction. As he lowered the canteen, the cold blade of the knife, which his numbed hands still clutched, drew across his cheek, and he dropped the canteen, while he held the gore-stained steel before him, his eyes fixed upon it in horror.

From this contemplation they next turned to the corpse of the murdered Conner.

Had the gates of the infernal regions opened in front of him, he could not have been more horror-stricken! With a shriek which cut the air, and echoed through the timber like the despairing cry of a lost soul, poor Monte Mose sprung to his feet, and with a wild leap rushed behind the nearest tree-trunk, his hair standing on end, and his wild eyes protruding.

There could be no doubt that he comprehended the situation, and really believed himself to be a murderer.

El Negro Bravo, seeing that the time had come, gave a signal to his followers, and all now ran forward.

"What's up here? By St. Iago, boys, there's Mose! I say, where in the mischief have you been, pard?"

Springing out into the moonlight, with the look of a hunted beast, Monte Mose glared madly at the new-comers.

Black Ben, feigning to have just discovered the body, cried out:

"Who have we here, Mose? A friend of yours? Hal! hal! old boy, why did you not say you had a pard so near camp, and let us know you were coming out to see him? What! Why the man is dead, Mose! What the devil does this mean?"

Monte Mose stood in the same spot, with the same look of insane horror stamped upon his features; while his eyes were fixed upon the man whom he supposed he had murdered.

"What does this mean?" repeated Black Ben. "Why did you not tell us you had a job of throat-cutting on hand?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mose. "How came I here? When did you last see me, Ben, and where?"

"I mean what I say," repeated the bandit chief. "How you came here, I don't know. You left San Antonio with us. We came to the Medina some four hours ago, and camped. We went to sleep; and, when we awoke, found that you had gone. We were hunting for you, heard you scream, and here we are. What your object was in this, I don't pretend to say; but I do know that we must make tracks from here, or stand a chance to stretch hemp. But that don't set us back any, as we were outlawed already!"

"Outlawed! Who are you?" asked the bewildered Mose.

"Who am I? Black Ben; as you very well know."

"You say that I came with you. These men, I presume, are your followers. May I ask if you are Rangers? But I know you are not. In Heaven's name, tell me who and what you are?" was the touching appeal of the young man.

"Black Ben, *alias* El Negro Bravo, chief of the Chaparral Cocks!"

As the bandit chief spoke these words, he lifted his sombrero politely, and added, as Mose gazed at him in despair:

"I am truly glad to count upon you as one of my brave prairie rovers. Never mind this little affair of yours; although I would advise you not to repeat the thing unless you are pretty sure of making yourself richer by it."

Poor Mose heard not these last words; for, as the full horror of his situation burst upon him, with a loud and heart-rending shriek, he fell senseless to the earth.

Almost like an echo of his, came another, which caused the bandits to start with surprise, mingled with superstitious awe, for they supposed no other human being was within miles.

This cry of misery came from Celeste Martinez, as she witnessed the great mental agony of her lover, and saw him fall to the ground.

"Help me to throw this buzzard-bait into the river, Pedro," said Black Ben, quickly. "Antonio, go on to the camp, and do what you

can to have things ready. We must git up and git out of here pretty lively, I can tell you."

The body of the old ranchero was hurled over the bank of the Medina, sinking from sight in the dark waters; then the two bandits hurried back, and carried the hapless Mose to camp, where he was once more secured to the saddle, and all galloped up the river, passing, as they went along, within twenty paces of the spot where lay the beautiful Castilian girl in a death-like swoon, her fair face upturned in the moonlight, and her long hair mingled with the dew-wet grass.

But the fates ordained that the outlaw band should not rest an eye upon her helpless loveliness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CHAPARRAL COCKS.

COLONEL WELLINGTON and Flora soon felt satisfied that the Tonkaway chief had inspected the bottom timber, and then proceeded on his way down the Rio Frio for help.

With feelings of extreme disgust, the colonel carried the dead body of the savage into the dense shrubbery; not deeming it prudent to venture to the river to dispose of it.

When he returned, great was his surprise, on stepping up to the door, to find Flora, with her gaze fixed in astonishment within the cabin.

"What is wrong now?" asked he, springing to her side.

"Father, we are left alone," she replied. "Augustine is gone. He is a traitor, as was Antonio, who is absent for some other purpose than the one he pretended!"

It was true. The Mexican was nowhere to be seen.

Colonel Wellington closed the door, and returned to Flora, who stood listening intently for any noise from the outside. They looked at each other for a moment.

"We are alone truly, my dear," said the old man, in a calm voice; "but I trust that no attack will be made on our home until Turtle and his friends arrive."

"I hope not, papa. Still, I have more fears now than before Augustine left us. When Antonio went away I thought that something must be wrong; and now my suspicions are fully awakened. I feel that both of them are connected with some gang of bandits, and only came into your service in order to act as spies. It is not a pleasant thought, but I cannot help it."

"Let us not create new dangers in our imagination, my daughter. God knows we are in great peril from the Indians; and I think that the reason Augustine has left us, is because he is a coward. He saw that his life was in danger, and I don't know that we can blame him."

We will now leave Colonel Wellington and Flora; both filled with dread forebodings, and watching out, first from one loop-hole and then from another, while we follow Augustine.

As his master said, the Mexican was indeed filled with fear in regard to the Indians. He expected that El Negro Bravo would soon arrive to sack the ranch; and, until the advent of the Tonkaway had entertained some hopes that his chief might be approaching from the south. When, however, he realized that danger threatened from a different foe, he made up his mind to escape the first opportunity. Therefore when his employer left the cabin for a moment, and Flora was looking out after him, the treacherous villain unbarred the door, and started in haste to the hut where, as the colonel had ordered, he had secured the horses.

This point was some two hundred yards from the cabin; and, as Augustine sprung through the border of bushes, he ran violently against a human being, both falling at the shock, and rolling over and over in confusion.

The Mexican closed his eyes, expecting a death-thrust; but his heart gave a bound of relief and joy, as he heard a low laugh from his supposed enemy, and the well-known voice of his chief gladdened his ears.

"By St. Iago! Augustine, you scoundrel, is this you?"

"Gracias a Dios!" he said; "El Negro Bravo!"

"Well, I am almost sure it is I, pard," was the reply; "though I do feel a little mixed. Get up, and shake the wrinkles out. How is every thing at the ranch?"

From where they stood, both bandits could

now see Colonel Wellington in the doorway, the room being lighted. It was only for a moment, however, for the door soon closed.

"What have you been doing, Augustine? I hope you haven't spilt the milk, as Antonio did. You fellows seem to make a botch of everything. Here I have got things all ready. The boys are back here in the timber, and just as I expected you would be on hand to let us into the cabin, here you come a kiting, and the door is shut on you. You'll see now the old coon will fight like a demon."

"Senor Capitan doesn't understand," said the Mexican. "I don't care to have my scalp torn off for nothing. A large war party of Comanches are camped up the river, and within five miles of us. It was no longer safe to stay."

"By St. Iago! This is a mixed up affair all around, I must say! We must work fast and get off with the girl before they arrive. How did you learn it Augustine?"

"From the Tonkaway chief. He has gone to bring some white scouts to the assistance of the ranch."

"Scouts, you say? Did Turtle mention any one?"

"Si, senor!" was the reply. "He spoke of Big Foot Wallace."

"Then I'll bet my sombrero that Carrolton is with the crowd. They must have done some tall old riding to get to the Frio so soon. But we lost some time."

The bandit chief scratched his head a moment in perplexity, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"I have an idea. We will corral the girl, and then give a fusilade. That will draw down the Comanches just in time to meet the scouts, and then they can have a first-class fandango while we will be on the safe side of the river."

"Where is Antonio?" questioned Augustine.

"He's with the crowd, but he has been wounded too bad to fight. We have no time for gab now, but must get to business at once. Get the girl's pony ready on the edge of the bush, and when you hear a coyote bark near the cabin, let the nag loose. I'll bet high the horse will go toward the ranch and draw the old man's attention to the rear door while I act lively in front."

Augustine started to obey this order, and El Negro Bravo joined his band a hundred yards further up the stream.

Seated apart from this villainous-looking gang of Mexicans was Monte Mose, who, as Black Ben came up, grasped a canteen and took a long pull at its contents. His eyes were blood-shot and a desperate look seemed frozen upon them. His features were drawn to correspond with this expression, and became almost frightful as he saw Black Ben break through the bushes.

The latter speedily issued his orders. Two of his most trusty Mestizoes were sent to the east side of the cabin, and directed, the one to lie in wait near the end of the veranda, while the other gained a position on the roof.

Leaving three of his followers within calling distance, the bandit chief hurried to the thicket, where the Mexican had informed him that Colonel Wellington had left the dead Comanche. He found the corpse, and fastening two lariats together, secured one end about it, giving, when this was done, the bark of a coyote, which was the signal agreed upon.

Soon he heard the canter of the pony to the rear of the cabin. He then stepped clear of the thicket and hurled the lariat, which was caught and hauled taut by the Mestizo whom he had stationed at the end of the veranda for that purpose. The dead brave was then jerked into the middle of the lawn, the lariat being concealed by the grass.

By an occasional twitch the corpse was made to appear alive, and in great suffering, though unable to sit erect.

We must now return to our friends in the cabin. The bark of the coyote, an unusual sound, smote upon their ears; but, before they had ceased to wonder at it, it was followed by one far more alarming. It was the clatter of horses' hoofs down the beaten path at the rear of the dwelling, and both ran at once to the back door.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it, Flora?"

"Don't be frightened, papa," she said, "it is only my pony."

The young girl was anxious to bring the pony inside the cabin, and was watching to see if any human being was in view before opening the door, when her father exclaimed:

"Merciful Heaven! What does that mean?" "What is it, papa?" said Flora, springing to his side.

"It is the same," he said, "for he is scalped. How do you suppose that dead Indian came to be in the opening again, at the same place from which I dragged it?"

"I do not know, papa. Oh, dear! This is terrible!"

"It is not dead, I see it move!" said the colonel again.

"Must you kill him, papa? It is dreadful to think of."

"It is, my child; but it is an act of mercy. Go and watch poor Skip, your pony, while I do it."

Colonel Wellington unbarred the door, and stepping across the sward, passed by the side of the Comanche. That instant his eye fell upon the rope, and he knew that all was lost. Without a moment's pause the Mestizo leaped from the roof and struck the old man a murderous blow on the temple with his revolver, felling him to the earth upon the corpse of the Comanche.

Flora witnessed this from the loop-hole, and with a piercing shriek flew toward the open door, leveling her rifle and firing at the ruffian, who now knelt by the senseless colonel, his knife upraised. The murderous half-breed fell dead; but at that moment the young girl felt herself seized, as El Negro Bravo grasped her in his arms, his followers galloping madly into the lawn, Antonio and Augustine in their midst!

"Father in Heaven protect me!" cried Flora, as she was dragged across the veranda toward her pony.

At this instant Monte Mose rode slowly around the cabin, seemingly unconscious of what was transpiring, but he caught the eyes of the young lady, who at once recognized him as an American.

"Save me!" she pleaded. "If you have any manhood in you, save me! For the love of your mother and sister, save a helpless girl from dishonor and death!"

Never did man change quicker than Monte Mose. His eyes became fixed upon the poor girl in a strange glare, his face became of a deadly pallor, and he brought his horse to a sudden halt by one jerk of his rein, yelling:

"Great God! My guardian angel!"

With this exclamation Mose drove spurs deep, and charged toward Flora, crying out, in a voice of command:

"Unhand that lady, Black Ben! Pollute her not by the touch of your hands! Unhand her, I say, or die!"

In his great surprise and madness the young man forgot to draw his weapon as he rode to the rescue, and Antonio, at a signal from his chief, sprung from his horse and attempted to intercept him, while Augustine struck the would-be preserver of Flora Wellington a crashing blow upon the head with his rifle. As poor Mose fell to the earth, there was heard a snorting and tramping of steeds, and then came the cry from El Negro Bravo:

"*Vamonos, muchachos! Vamonos!*"

With snort and plunge and rattling of arms and spurs, the bandits darted from the ranch to the river, fording to the south side and proceeding up-stream, fearing to stop for plunder, as they knew that the shot which was fired by Flora must have been heard in the camp of the Comanches.

As Monte Mose, her only hope, fell senseless, Flora fainted, and was borne away in the arms of El Negro Bravo, leaving her guardian dead or dying between the Indian and the Mestizo; while Mose lay near at hand, and all with their ghastly, gore-smeared faces, a horrid picture in the clear moonlight.

CHAPTER XIX.

CELESTE.

RECOVERING from her swoon, and guided by the sound, Celeste Martinez saw those who had figured in the recent tragedy speeding along the bank of the river.

She noticed that Monte Mose was leaning forward in his saddle, and judged that he was being carried off to be forced into a criminal career by the bandit chief.

Weak and exhausted though she was, she determined to follow them. She knew now that her lover had no true knowledge of Black Ben's character when he had met the latter in San Antonio; and he might yet be saved.

But Celeste knew that she could not follow the outlaws any length of time without food.

Judging that El Negro Bravo would proceed through a sparsely settled country, where she could not procure food, even if she dared to approach a ranch—for she was fearful of being recognized as a female when the sun arose—she was puzzled for a moment what to do; but the sight of poor Conner's cabin, with its open door, gave her grounds for settling the difficulty which perplexed her.

Although she trembled with dread at the thought of entering the home of the murdered man, she bravely shook off the feeling. She had launched herself on a sea of troubles, and she must now go on, if need be, to the bitter end. So she ran toward the house and entered it. Some coffee, already prepared, rewarded her search, and she drank of it eagerly. She then appropriated such articles of food, consisting of corn bread and dried beef, as she could conveniently carry with her, and then fled like a guilty thing back to the corral. The mustang had been grazing ever since she had arrived, screened from view by a motte of post-oaks, beneath which was a dense thicket.

Patting the animal, which now seemed to have become attached to her, and speaking softly to him, she gained her seat in the saddle and headed up the stream, following the course of the bandits.

At first the Castilian girl kept on the border of the plain, putting her horse to great speed; but soon she came to a walk, listening to the noise made by the outlaws as they rode through the bushes.

For some miles she traveled in this way, when at length she beheld through an opening the gang fording the Rio Medina, and Celeste was forced to stop some time to allow them to pass the bottom timber on the opposite side of the stream. As soon as it was safe for her to do so, she crossed the river, and, upon passing through the timber, saw the bandits galloping south-west over the prairie, it being, at this time, not far from sunrise. Thus it was that when El Negro Bravo and his companions entered the camp of the main party of the Chaparral Cocks on the Rio San Miguel, Celeste was secreted in the woods near at hand; and when night came followed them to Wellington Ranch.

To return to Monte Mose. Had his brain been free from the effects of the liquor, which caused him to be almost insane, and had he been able to dwell upon one line of thought for any length of time, he would doubtless have risked his life in an endeavor to escape from his criminal associates; but El Negro Bravo well knew the weaker point of his victim, and furnished Mose with the strong muscal, of which he had a supply on hand; besides working on his fears in regard to the danger he was in at the hands of the Vigilance Committee, should he return to the Alamo City.

When the Chaparral Cocks made halt in the opening above Wellington Ranch, and their leader left them to reconnoiter, Celeste Martinez was near at hand in a thicket, watching the bandits. She saw the return of the chief, and when the Mexicans, mounted and on foot, started through the wood, she secured her horse to a limb, and followed them; judging, from the actions of the gang, that some dastard deed was to be committed. It was fortunate for her, perhaps, that several of the band loitered in the rear, between herself and Mose; else she would, without doubt, have braved capture to get speech with him.

Celeste was now obliged to keep within the creek-bottom timber, to prevent being seen by some of the scattered bandits, who were approaching the ranch in squads of three and four. She saw them gallop over the opening, and heard the splash of water, as they forded the stream; but, though she scanned each form closely, she saw no sign of her lover returning with them.

Had they killed him? Was the shot, which she had heard fired, aimed at him for whom she had dared so much? There was some hope still, that he might have deserted the bandits when he realized their object. Poor Celeste! Had she been but a few yards nearer, she would have seen him!

She reached the stream, and crawled down the bank, sheltered from view by the drooping branches. Here she dashed the cool water over her heated temples, and drank freely; but was brought to a sudden stop by the sight of Antonio, who now rode down into the river, his eyes wandering along the bank, and seeming to penetrate the foliage. With a sigh of relief, she saw the Greaser pass up the bank,

and secrete his horse in the bushes near at hand. He then stood, with a long lasso coiled in his hand, and listening intently. Once or twice he sprung to cover, pale with fear; but each time returned to listen eagerly for some sound from over the Rio Frio.

It was evident to Celeste, from the Mexican's manner, that he expected some one to cross the ford, and whom he intended to kill; but that he greatly feared his vengeance might be interrupted by some party from the direction of the ranch, and who might be expected to show him no mercy.

Not long had the Greaser to wait. As Celeste watched him she saw that his face was filled with demoniac exultation, and he quickly adjusted his lasso. Glancing at the opposite bank, she saw an Indian, of noble bearing, and decorated with a plume of eagle-feathers, dash on his mustang through the bushes, and shoot down the bank into the water. Following him were three Texans, also mounted, who rode down into the Frio, and urged their animals on in the trail of the Indian up the bank. One of these was a borderman, strong of build; the others were youths, all habited in buckskin, and armed to the teeth.

While the young girl watched, not being able to determine in her mind what their mission might be, she saw a fourth horseman spur-ring his horse into the ford, in the tracks of the others. To her surprise and joy, she recognized in him the same person to whom Mose had delivered the note in San Antonio. It was evident that this stranger had been in company with the scouts who had preceded him, but had fallen in the rear from being unable to keep up the same speed.

Celeste was on the point of calling out, and claiming the protection of this man, who impressed her so favorably, when her heart sprung to her throat in horror. Like a flash she beheld the coil of Antonio's lasso cut the air with a hissing sound, and the deadly noose drop over the head of the stranger horseman.

She covered her face with her hands, as she heard a loud snort from the steed, and then the sudden dashing of its hoofs into the earth, as it bounded away in its mad frigh; while, at the same moment, the sudden fall of some heavy body to the earth struck her ears, and then a fiendish exultant laugh which froze the very blood in her veins.

The beautiful maiden, for an instant, was dazed with terror and deep concern; and then, the consciousness that another foul and atrocious murder was being committed, aroused her once more to determined action. If she could not prevent his death, at least she might avenge it.

Crawling to a more advantageous position, and dragging her carbine by her side, she found that, by standing erect, she could look directly into the road that led from the bank of the Frio to the opening.

Poor Celeste saw that her worst apprehensions were no more than facts, for the lasso of the Greaser had caught about the shoulders of the young man, dragging him from his horse to the earth, while the sudden shock seemed to have stunned him.

Low upon the ground the stranger lay, the image of death; while astride of him was the cowardly Mexican, his wounded hands still bound with their bloody bandages. The fearful revenge for which Antonio had waited and watched, was to all appearance now before him. Was there no help?

The Greaser held his *cuchilla* uplifted, suspended in the air, a fiendish look of exultation upon his face, his snake-like eyes filled with bloodthirsty rage, his thin lips drawn, showing his white teeth that glittered like those of an enraged beast that was gloating over a slain enemy. The blood in the veins of Celeste darted lightning-like, as did her thoughts; and she became for the moment as determined, as murderous, and as vengeful, as the wretch before her.

Instantly she raised her carbine, and pulled the trigger.

A sounding report followed, echoing strangely upon the silent night. Antonio dropped his knife, threw up his maimed hands over his head, and with a low groan fell forward, rolling down the steep bank into the river and vanishing from sight.

With one bound, Celeste sprang into the trail and grasped the slack of the lasso which still encircled the stranger's shoulders; then, collecting all her strength, she drew him over

the slight decline, and he rolled down into the thicket in which she had been concealed from view. At this moment, hearing the noise of horses approaching, she ran down the bank in terror, tripping on a tangled vine, falling forward and striking her head against a sapling. Then she fell prone by the side of the man whom she had saved from a fearful death.

About the time that Celeste had left her look-out in the timber, Monte Mose partially recovered and rose to a sitting posture. He was not long in discovering the prostrate forms of a white man, an Indian, and a Mexican; the latter being, as he knew at once, a member of the Chaparral Cocks. He had not observed either of these when he had rode around the cabin, and was called on by the young lady to protect her from the brutal bandit who had assailed her, and was carrying her off.

While his gaze was thus fixed, trying to unwind the tangled thread of the past, Colonel Wellington also revived, and arose, leaning upon his elbow and rubbing his eyes in bewilderment. He was not long in comprehending the dread events of the night, and he uttered a long, deep groan.

Catching sight of Monte Mose, the old man exclaimed:

"Who are you, my friend; and how came you in this condition? Ah! I see. You happened here during the attack, and strove to defend us. May Heaven bless you!"

"Heaven will never bless me, sir!" said Mose, in a hoarse voice. "It is true I got this blow in trying to prevent El Negro Bravo from abducting your daughter; but I am a villain for all that—too base and cowardly for honest men to associate with, or even look upon!"

The old man looked at the speaker for a moment, in surprise blended with pity, and then cried out:

"It is not so! You are laboring under a delusion. The blow on your head has caused it, but you will soon recover. Your very words prove you to be the opposite of what you assert. Besides, it is evident from your language, if nothing more, that you are a gentleman."

"I was one, not long since," was the sad reply.

"Well, do not talk so," said the colonel. "We are two men, here alone by ourselves, and a large war-party of Comanches is camped near us. We must secrete ourselves, or we shall be tortured and scalped!"

"Fly, and save yourself," said the young man. "I have no desire to live; indeed death would be welcome."

Both the colonel and Mose had received fearful blows, which had torn their scalps and caused a great loss of blood; consequently they were weak and giddy, besides being confused somewhat as to what had transpired; but they staggered into the dense shades, and lay down to rest, knowing it would be impossible to follow the trail of the bandits.

Under the circumstances it was not strange that, when they heard the galloping of horses, as the Tonkaway chief, followed by the three scouts, rode up to the ranch, they lay low, thinking that the Comanches had at last come.

CHAPTER XX.

TOO LATE.

TURTLE the Tonkaway, as we have seen, piloted the scouts and Clarence Carrolton to the ranch; himself anxious and impatient to arrive in time to save his white friends, and galloping on ahead, passing in his haste, the thicket within which lay Celeste.

When the Tonkaway chief urged his panting mustang into the opening in front of the cabin, his great heart throbbed with grief and anguish, for he saw that he had come too late. As he sat upon his horse, gazing right and left, his keen eyes reading every sign, Big Foot Wallace, Fighting Ben and Reckless Joe dashed into the opening, and brought their steeds to a halt by his side.

Upon the arrival of the scouts, Turtle sprung from his horse, and with his form half bent to the earth studied each impression on the sod, eventually coming to a stop by the side of the dead Mestizo and Comanche, with a guttural grunt of surprise mingled with relief as he examined the corpse of the former.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat!" cried out Big Foot, as he pulled rein. "Ther pesky red varmints gut in ahead on us, sure an' sartin. They has cleaned out ther ranch, an' tuck off ther cumil an' ther leetle Flowyer o' ther Frio!"

Boys, we-uns hes gut hefty biz on hand ter git 'em outen ther scrape. Howsmever, I'll lose my sculp er git 'em back, ef I hes ter skoot clean ter ther sand-hills. What's ther sign, say?"

"Comanche no come," was Turtle's answer. "Mexican steal Flower of Frio. Ride fast over river."

"Great Go-hoss-er-fat! Yer don't say so! Wa-al thet are a heap better, fer we kin sarcumvent 'em slicker an' cleaner than we could ther reds; an' ther leetle gal will stand a heap better show fer her life, I reckon."

"I don't know so much about that," said Fighting Ben doubtfully, springing from his horse as he spoke, and kicking the body of the half-bred over, to allow the moon to light up the face.

"If this is not one of El Negro Bravo's gang of cut-throats, I'll never buck against monte again! Boys, I would rather have a friend of mine captured by Indians than by that layout. They say that the leader is a white man, and his band all Mexicans; but, from his deeds, his heart must be as black as the very hinges of Hades!"

"By our lady!" said Reckless Joe, in much disappointment, "I had been counting on a good square meal upon our arrival at Celeste. Wellington, after such an appetizing John Gilpin ride, but I see my visions of the culinary luxuries of Aunt Huld's float into the d'm distance, disappear, evaporate, evaporate, leaving an empty void in both mind and stomach. But avaunt, and quit me mind and thought, all corporeal luxuries, when an innocent and lovely maiden and her aged parent are torn from home and hearth by ruthless foes! Now is the time for Joseph to rush into the din and carnage of battle, to restore them to peace and happiness, besides wiping out forever the demons who have wrought this misery."

"Give us a rest, Joe," said Ben; "where do you suppose Carrolton can be? He certainly must have missed the ford, or he would have reached here before this time."

Turtle was just about to inspect the cabin, in fact the chief's foot was on the veranda as Ben asked this question; when, at the same instant, the loud report of Celeste's carbine rung through the timber, and the riderless steel of Clarence galloped into the opening, snorting with terror. This showed them plainly that their friend had come to grief.

With gloomy looks of apprehension the scouts whirled their horses, and spurred back to the river, followed by the Tonkaway, who seemed for once in his life, to be really mystified.

The chief had observed many things which had not caught the notice of the scouts. He knew that the Mestizo had been killed by a bullet, and that the report of the gun must, on such a clear night, have been heard by the Comanches. He also knew that two men had been left for dead upon the lawn by the bandits; and that these men had since been carried away, or had recovered and left of themselves.

It was certain that the Comanches had not been there, or the Mestizo would have been scalped, and the cabin fired.

The pools of blood which had run from the wounded, and had since cooled, forming a slight skin on the surface, had been recently disturbed; and this was a sure sign to the red chief. But ere he had time to reason on the subject further, the report of the rifle, and the appearance of the steed of the New Yorker, warned him that danger was near.

All now spurred for the ford; and their approach it was, that frightened poor Celeste Martinez, occasioning her fall down the bank and into the thicket.

When they reached the river, they saw no signs of Carrolton, but to their surprise, as they eagerly scanned the stream above and below, they observed a Mexican struggling up the opposite bank, and clutching at brush and grass with hands that were bloody and bandaged.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat!" yelled Big Foot. "Boys, thet's ther yaller-hided terranteler what Ben pinned ter ther door o' ther Bull's Head in San Antonio, an' he's killed ther New Yorker, dead sure!"

As the old scout spoke, his rifle together with Ben's and Joe's weapons were leveled quickly, and the three guns were blended in one report. Antonio threw up his bandaged hands, tottered for an instant on the bank, and then, with a terrible yell of agony and de-

spair, fell backward, rolling down the bank, and sinking beneath the black waters of the Rio Frio!

The death-cry of the Mexican spy seemed to be the signal for the crowning act in the night's tragedy at Wellington's Ranch; for no sooner had it been lost in the bubbling deep than the woods rung with the war-whoops of the Comanches, which burst suddenly from high three score of throats, and as many half-wild steeds, from the West and North, thundered toward the cabin.

As these sounds burst upon the air, the Tonkaway galloped up to the scouts on the bank of the river, exclaiming:

"My white brothers will ford Frio. Big war party. Comanche heap mad. Maybe so find Mexican trail over river. White scouts hide in bushes. Turtle fool Comanche. Ride fast or lose sculp. Then no save Flower of Frio."

"Come on, pards!" cried the old scout. "Ther chief air k'orrect. We've gut no biz hereaways; an' if we ooesn't git, we stands a chance ter lose h'ar, an' ther leetle gall is gone up then, dead sure an' sartin."

With these words, Big Foot headed his horse down the bank, followed rather reluctantly by Joe and Ben; who, however, after a moment's reflection, saw that it would be madness to make a stand against such odds. Soon they were securely hidden on the south side of the Frio; but, much to their surprise, they found that Turtle had not accompanied them, although his mustang had come up close behind, with the chief's rifle, and such things as would be in his way while scouting through the thicket.

The Tonkaway had arrived at the bank of the river in time to see Antonio fall, pierced by the bullets of the scouts; and he instantly connected the Mexican with the previous rifle-shot, and the disappearance of Carrolton, as well as with the removal of the bodies from the front of the cabin.

The chief knew that one of the bodies had been that of the old colonel, for he discovered some gray hairs on the spot where it had lain; and he determined to ascertain, if possible, whether his old friend was dead or alive, before he left on the trail to rescue Flora from the bandits.

With this object in view, and disregarding the extreme danger to himself, the chief, as the scouts spurred down the bank to ford the river, slid from his horse and plunged into the bottom, plunging suddenly upon the still forms of Clarence and Celeste. Turtle gave a grunt of pleasure as he recognized the friend of the scouts, and another of surprise as he caught sight of the face of the young girl.

A quick pressure of his hand upon the breast of the New Yorker satisfied him that the latter was not dead; and rapidly, one thought after another darted through his brain.

With Turtle, to think was to act. He comprehended the situation, for the tell-tale lariat still encircled the shoulders of Carrolton. He saw that Antonio had roped the New Yorker, as the latter had come up in the rear of the scouts; and that the strange girl, in male attire, had chanced to be near, and had saved the young man's life.

The Tonkaway knew that the scouts were much distressed, as well as alarmed, at the disappearance of their friend; and also, that they had been forced, at sight of the riderless steed, to think that he had been killed. Besides, the discovery of Antonio led them to think that he had been the murderer. He now saw that if he saved the life of the young man, he must keep all knowledge of the disguised girl from him.

Springing between them, therefore, Turtle loosened the lasso, and raised the New Yorker, keeping his face turned away from Celeste, who lay but a pace or two from him.

"White man heap sick," he said. "Turtle take him over river to scouts. Keep tongue still. Stay here, lose sculp."

"Heaven bless you, chief!" said Carrolton, now shuddering at the terrible yells of the Comanches which filled his ears. "You came just in time. Where is the Mexican? He certainly got the 'drop' on me, in every sense of the word!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TURTLE DISAPPEARS.

HAD Clarence known of the presence of Celeste Martinez, he would have remained by her, and saved her at the risk of his life, even

though he were ignorant of the noble sacrifice that she had made for him. This, the Tonkaway knew, although he had seen so little of the young New Yorker. So he kept silence; and, pushing Carrolton into the stream, assisted him in crossing.

The Frio bottom timber now resounded with whoop and yell, as the Comanches sacked the ranch, and hunted through the woods for fugitives, each sound causing the chief to make greater exertions in getting Clarence across the river, well-knowing that the poor Castilian girl was liable, at any moment, to be discovered and murdered. Before they had half-crossed the stream, the cool waters had greatly revived the young man, and both were soon standing on the further bank.

An imitation of the black wolf's yelp broke from the Tonkaway's throat upon reaching shelter, which was answered from a little distance off. He then exclaimed:

"White man run fast. Soon see scouts. Turtle go back over Frio."

"Go back over the river, chief? You must be insane, my friend. The Comanches will cut you in pieces!"

The Tonkaway made no reply; for, at this moment, they broke into a thicket, and the voice of Big Foot reached them.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat! Ther chief hev run ag'in' Carrolton, an' he haven't lost a ha'r! Whar in ther name of Davy Crockett hev yer bin, pard?"

"You're a lucky man, Carrolton," said Fighting Ben; "but don't be too sure of winning every time. It is my opinion that the Comanches would have raked you in out of the wet, had it not been for our red friend, who, from appearances, must have found you in soak. We were feeling sad enough in regard to you, and to the young lady whom you hoped to meet at Wellington Ranch."

"Have the colonel and his daughter come to harm?" asked Clarence, quickly, as he grasped the extended hand of the Texan. "I have been so confused by the fall I got from my horse, and all the hideous confusion over the river, that I had forgotten to ask the chief anything about them. Can it be that they are at the mercy of those yelling fiends across the stream?"

"Shake the water outen yer ears," said Big Foot, "and take a sot down. We-uns he ter wait fer sun-up afore we counts anything dead sure. Yer see, things is ruther mixed jest about now. Whar yer goin', Tonk'!"

But, without a word, the chief disappeared in the dark shades toward the river, and the old scout continued:

"Waal, boys, thar hain't no kinder use tryin' ter 'vise er reg'late ther Tonk'. He keeps a-kitin', but he most ginerly draps down when he are wanted. Howsomever, pard, es I war 'bout ter ax, how come yer ter drap offen yer nag an' ther trail at the same time? We 'bout 'cluded that yer war a gone-up pilgrim."

"Well, gentlemen," explained Clarence, as he seated himself on a log in the moonlit space within the thicket: "I was unable to keep up with you through the thick branches after we reached the bottom, but was not far behind you at the ford. As I gained the north bank, a lasso flew over my head, and I caught a glimpse of the same Mexican villain who tried to kill me at the Bull's Head in San Antonio. I had no sooner recognized him, however, than my horse sprung into the air with a snort of fright. I felt the animal dash from under me, and then, with a great shock, I struck the earth, and knew no more. When I recovered, the chief was assisting me to my feet; and, now that I recall my surroundings, I know that it was in a dense thicket, which is very strange, for when I was lassoed I was on the clear trail by the ford. It is a mystery to me how the Tonkaway could have galloped back from the ranch in time to save me from the knife of that Greaser, and equally so that I find you on this side of the river."

"Thar's a heap more o' myst'ry 'round loose," said Big Foot. "Fustly, ther Tonk' were ther last one ter git ter ther river arter yer boss come a kitin' an' we-uns heerd a rifle-shot. When we struck ther ford, ther Greaser what Ben pinned ter ther Bull's Head door war a-scratchin' dirt up ther side o' ther stream whar ther bank war nigh straight up an' down, an' we gi'n him a hull box o' blue pills, thet tasted so dang'd bad thet he hed ter spread hisself mighty peart, an' go fer some Frio water on ther jump, ter wash 'em down. I kinder reckon he's on thet drink till yit."

"Then you boys shot the Mexican?" asked Clarence.

"Reckon he'll not try ter stick yer in ther back, er sling a rope ag'in," returned the old scout.

"Well, that's one relief," was the reply; "although I would have drawn a bead upon him myself, with a good relish. I am satisfied that he was a verification that there is such a thing as natural depravity. I do not believe there is a more cowardly assassin among the Indians beyond the river. But did I not hear you say, Wallace, that you heard a shot just after my horse galloped up to the ranch?"

"Thet are 'zactly what I spit out," affirmed Big Foot.

"Then, who fired the shot?" asked Clarence, in amazement.

"Can't tell yer. Hit are a myst'ry. But I'm dead sure thar's some one layin' round loose in ther bush, what's white enough ter risk ha'r ter save yer life. Reckon the Tonk' knows a heap more'n he lets on. He doesn't wag his talker much, but keeps his moccasins floppin' lively."

"Well, gentlemen," put in Reckless Joe; "this may be interesting to you, but I must remark that I am in an extended state of starvation. I'm hungry enough to devour a brace of b'iled owls on the half-shell. I have got to do one of two things; either fight or eat. And it must be decided which pretty soon, me lords, if you wouldn't see me chaw my own head off with vexation."

During Joe's remarks, the New Yorker had clasped his head with his hands, in anxious thought, striving to connect recent matters and events. He now spoke:

"Tell me, gentlemen, what you know of the Wellingtons. You certainly arrived at the ranch before that war-party put in an appearance. I cannot believe that you would sit idly here if they were in the power of those red devils who are creating such a pandemonium over the Rio Frio."

"All we have learned, Carrolton," said Fighting Ben, "would not cause you to feel easier in your mind. The ranch had been attacked previous to our arrival. The Wellingtons have probably been taken captive by the Greasers, and we will take the trail as soon as it is light enough for the Tonkaway to read the sign. There were two men killed, near the cabin; a Mexican and an Indian—the latter evidently a spy sent out by this war-party."

"It seems," said Clarence, "that deeds of blood are springing up on every side. I shall begin to think that I am doomed, and that my object in coming to this State is not likely to be accomplished."

"Things do look a little blue at the present moment," admitted Ben; "but we'll sweep the board for you when we get the handling of the cards. Wait till it comes our deal, and you'll see us knock spots out of everything."

"Right, me lord duke!" assented Reckless Joe. "Let me tell you, Carrolton, when our circus begins you'll see me carve a hole in the Comanche nation that will keep the squaws howling for twelve moons. But just now I feel more like carving a turkey, or slashing my bowie through a buffalo-hump. However, my friendship is adhesive, and I don't think I'll go on a foraging expedition just at present. King of the Post-oaks, what dost thou on thy knees? Art repenting of thy evil deeds?"

"Keep yer gab clost for awhile, pards," said Big Foot in a low voice, as he crouched on the edge of the thicket and listened intently. "Thar are some sounds mixed inter them red howls that I doesn't like ter hear, an' I can't jist make out why. I wish ther 'Tonk' would glide back. Reckon he's tryin' ter stick another Curmanch'."

"Then he killed the Indian we found lying by the cabin, did he?" asked Fighting Ben.

"Didn't yer know that? Hashed him 'fore he come away!"

"Before he came to procure our assistance, do you mean? How was that?" inquired Ben.

"Jest so," answered the old scout. "Ther Tonkaway socked his slasher inter him afore he scooted fer our camp. Yer mought 'a' know'd ther pesky red wouldn't 'a' mixed in ther fight between ther whites an' ther Greasers. I kin tell yer jest how thet war. Ther cuss war on ther spy from ther Curmanch' camp above."

CHAPTER XXII.

TURTLE'S SPIRIT STALKS IN THE SHADE.

THE Tonkaway, upon reaching the scouts,

left without giving any explanation to Big Foot, who called after him, and glided back on the same trail toward the Frio, fearful that the Comanches would discover the young girl whom he had left, as she lay senseless by the ford.

He knew that the shots fired by the scouts at Antonio would draw some of the war-party toward the ford. He had seen, as he assisted Clarence to his feet, that the branches of the saplings had been bent and broken by their passage, a fact which could not fail to be detected by the Comanches.

He knew, also, that he must work fast and ascertain the trail taken by the bandits, and guide the scouts to the rescue of Flora Wellington; but he was also aware that Flora, even though he were to assist in saving her, would never forgive him if he left the ranch without gaining some reliable intelligence in regard to the fate of the colonel.

With these thoughts in his mind, the rescue of the girl in masculine attire being first, the Tonkaway gained the river near the ford, and, to his great anxiety, saw half a dozen Comanche braves inspecting the path on the opposite bank, and not twenty paces from the spot on which he had left the senseless maiden. Turtle now ran at his best speed down the stream, made his way to the water's edge, and without noise sunk beneath the surface, swimming under the water until the overhanging branches completely sheltered his form from view.

Casting his eyes upward to the path, he now saw that several of the Comanches were examining the bent twigs on the border of the trail. These braves were making gestures of caution, each to the other, and giving vent, at the same time, to their satisfaction by low, exultant grunts.

Turtle saw that there was no time to lose, if he would save the life of the white squaw. Glancing at the place where he had last seen her, he perceived that she had revived and was sitting upright, gazing in horror and dread at the savages, who were slowly approaching.

The chief knew now that he had a more difficult task than he had anticipated; for the girl had never seen him, and when she did, would take him to be an enemy.

With one great bound, he gained the side of Celeste, and leaned over her, grasping her long hair in one hand, and holding his knife and her carbine in the other. As he had hoped, the girl gave one loud shriek, and fell fainting to the earth. As this sound broke upon their ears, the Comanches, sprung erect, not ten paces away, and drawing their bows, began fitting their arrows.

Between the braves and our two friends was a small patch of moonlit sward, and to it, as Celeste fell backward, the Tonkaway glided, and stood facing his foes.

For a moment the Comanches seemed frozen in their tracks, their eyes fixed in superstitious horror upon the strange sight before them; then, as they realized that the chief whom, the evening previous, they had hacked, and scalped, and burned to ashes—that the same dreaded Turtle the Tonkaway stood before them—they gave one wild yell, and sprung up the trail, as if the traditional bad spirit of their tribe was at their heels.

Quick as the lightning of the Mexican Gulf, the arm of the chief was drawn back, and his long knife flew through the air and was buried hilt-deep in the back of the last brave, who rolled down the bank with a loud death-whoop which gave greater speed to the others. Stooping down, the Tonkaway drew out his knife, and circling the head of the gasping Comanche, tore off his scalp. Securing this to his belt, he sprung forward, and gathering the Castilian girl in his brawny arms, bounded through the timber toward the creek, pausing but once to note the warning yell which told the main war-party that something threatened their expedition with unusual peril.

After this all was silent as the dead around Wellington Ranch, as the chief sped toward the concealed hut of the herders, with Celeste in his arms. Arriving there, he stepped upon a pile of saddles, and reaching upward he laid the unconscious girl upon a small loft among some half-dried herbs, and darted back again into the darkness.

Turtle gained a position on the outskirts of the creek-bottom, where, by parting the branches with his hands, a clear view could be had of the opening in front of the cabin. He reached this spot at the moment when the Comanches who had been at the ford came up,

and joined the main party; and it was very evident to Turtle that these braves were still much confused by his appearance from the land of spirits. They were now all collected together upon the lawn; and, by word and sign, the braves from the ford were explaining to their chief what had occurred.

At first the Comanche leader, whom Turtle now recognized as Yellow Bear, seemed to be as much moved as they; but, after a moment, as he saw that his warriors were making ready to stampede, he ordered them to collect around him, and thus addressed them:

"My braves have seen strange sights. They have dreamed with eyes open. The Bad Spirit has crawled into their ears. Turtle the Tonkaway has gone to his fathers. He will make no more trails. His death yell scared the owls of the Frio. His scalp hangs at the belt of Rolling Thunder. The Tonkaway chief has sounded his last war-cry. Yellow Bear is a chief. He knows the white dogs are in the woods. He knows the Mexicanos have been here. We are on the war-path, but our knives are clean.

"Our belts shall hang heavy with scalps when we turn our backs to the rising sun. The Mexicanos shall hear our war-cry and tremble. The Texanos shall yelp with fear like coyotes. They must die. The spirits of our dead braves cry loudly for blood. Shall we crawl in holes and hide like coyotes? Shall we tell our squaws a bad spirit drove us from the war-trail? Shall the Apaches tell us to put on calico and hoe corn? No!" thundered the chief. "Yellow Bear says no! Tell this to the Bad Spirit. I have spoken."

Seeing that they were looked upon with scorn after this speech of Yellow Bear, the braves from the ford slunk backward; but notwithstanding the impression made by their chief's words, none seemed willing to venture out.

Turtle saw that Aunt Huld and Picayune had been taken from the cabin and bound upon the backs of two mustangs, and also that all the articles which an Indian values had been removed. He now regretted that he had not gone into the cabin when he first arrived and taken the negroes to a secure hiding-place.

These discoveries the Tonkaway made while Yellow Bear was making his speech; then, as his eyes roved toward the corral where the Indian horses were secured, it occurred to him that now was a favorable opportunity to stampede these animals, and thus have the war-party at a disadvantage. As this thought struck him, he caught sight of two white men, skulking from motte to motte toward the corral, and in one of them, to his joy, he recognized Colonel Wellington. Like a specter, Turtle glided from cover to cover, darting across the patches of moonlight in the rear of the cabin, and reached the corral just in time to see the old colonel and the stranger each vault upon the back of a mustang and go bounding up the Frio! But they had not gone ten yards when the Comanches discovered them, and those who happened to be mounted at once galloped in pursuit.

Turtle felt sure that the colonel and his comrade would soon be overtaken and scalped; for he knew, from his previous examination of the lawn, as well as from the movements of both the men, that they had been wounded and were now weak from the loss of blood.

Resolving to save them, he cut the lariat that secured a mustang to the corral, vaulted into the saddle, and lashed the animal around the north side of the inclosure. Bounding across the corner, he halted between the fugitives and the pursuing Comanches, directly in the path of the latter.

At sight of the supposed apparition, every warrior brought his mustang to a halt, and sat silent in horror. Slowly the left arm of Turtle was raised above his head, his finger pointing to the sky, as he walked his pony in a stiff manner directly toward the Comanches. He had not proceeded ten paces when every Indian whirled his mustang, and all, with yells of terror, lashed their steeds into a headlong gallop toward the cabin. Having succeeded so far, the Tonkaway chief bounded up the Frio after the two white men, but soon found that they had taken to the dense timber, and that it would be useless to follow. At this moment a fusillade of rifle-shots rung from the vicinity of the ranch, mingled with whoops and yells of agony.

These sounds Turtle felt confident were caused by the scouts making an attack from

the ford; and, knowing that it was just the time for such an onslaught, now that the Comanches were so demoralized, he had good reasons for thinking that his friends might be successful.

Darting down the bank of the stream, he found his mustang secured to a tree, and his arms hanging from the horn of the saddle. Loosing the lariat, Turtle sprang into the saddle, whirled his steed about, and fording the river, followed the path until he could sit on his horse and gaze through the branches into the opening opposite the ranch.

All this time he had heard sounds of conflict, and he could now see that the scouts were posted in the border of the creek bottom, to the east of the cabin, and were firing across the lawn at the Comanches.

He could hear the yells of Yellow Bear, and saw, as he reached his position, that the braves who had been ordered in pursuit of the two whites, and had been so terrified by his sudden appearance in their path, were now making their way, urged on by their chief, to flank the scouts.

The frequent and suspicious glances which these warriors cast behind them, made it very apparent that it needed but a third appearance to break up the battle.

Turtle had not long to sit idle. For a short time all was silent as death, and then a peculiar cry sounded from the creek, which was answered by Yellow Bear; but these signals were followed by a long drawn howl from the Tonkaway chief, which no sooner ended, than a wild, joyous cheer sounded from the covert of the scouts, who well knew from what friendly throat the howl proceeded. This was followed by a line of fire from out the border of the timber, and the leaden messengers of death cut through the mass of warriors on the lawn. No sooner were the rifles of the scouts discharged, than a hail of bullets hurtled among the Indians from their six shooters, and the woods resounded with wild whoops and appalling death-yells.

Yellow Bear, terrible in his rage at losing so many of his braves, galloped here and there, collecting a score and more of warriors, and led them in a furious charge upon the whites; who, being driven by the flankers toward the ford, had not the time to reload. Turtle began to see, that, although his white friends fought like madmen, they were doomed, did he not make quick and sure work; so, tossing his rifle to his shoulder, he blazed away. Then, with the piercing war-cry of his tribe, he dashed in between the whites and their savage assailants.

At this critical moment, the scouts, who had reloaded, turned to see the flanking Indians who had heard the Tonkaway war-cry, quickly come to a halt, and then turn and fly like frightened sheep, tearing and crashing desperately through the thick underbrush.

"Ther red scum daren't face a spook!" yelled Big Foot Wallace. "Dog-gone 'em; now's ther time ter thin out ther varmints. At 'em, pards, an' send every dang'd bullet inter thar red meat!"

Taking in the situation at a glance, Fighting Ben, Reckless Joe, and Clarence Carrollton, followed the old scout, spurring their horses, which they had now mounted, into the opening, each with deadly revolver in hand, and with nimble fingers picked triggers, letting fly a rattling fusillade, which, coupled with the reappearance of Turtle the Tonkaway, caused the Comanches to stampede in a demoralized mob up the Rio Frio, leaving a score of dead and dying braves upon the green sward of the lawn of Wellington Ranch.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that the scouts, impatient at the non-appearance of their friend, the Tonkaway, and hearing the appealing screams of Huld and Picayune mingled with the yells of the Comanches, had dashed across the Rio Frio, under the cover of the timber, and opened a deadly fire upon the Indians, who were then about to burn the cabin. The absence of the packed animals and the negroes, showed Turtle that a part of the Indians had been sent away, previous to the attack made upon them by Big Foot and his party, with the plunder of the cabin.

The Comanches, overcome with their superstitious wonder and alarm at the repeated appearances of the Tonkaway chief so suddenly and mysteriously at various points, now attributed their disastrous defeat to the Bad Spirit of their traditions, who had sent the spirit of Turtle from death-land to avenge himself!

After the last of the war-party had disappeared in the heavy shades up the Rio Frio, the whites rushed up to the cabin, and tore away the burning brush from the logs, fighting the fire manfully, and finally succeeding in extinguishing it with green boughs.

When this had been accomplished, Turtle sprang into the creek bottom, and proceeded quickly toward the herder's hut, where he had placed the senseless form of the young girl whom he had saved from a terrible fate.

Stepping upon the heap of saddles, the chief exclaimed in a reassuring voice, as he reached up to the loft where he had placed the unconscious maiden:

"Come, pale squaw. No fear Tonkaway. Turtle is a red-man, but his heart is white!"

The Tonkaway chief sprang to the earth-floor of the hut, with a guttural ejaculation of disappointment.

The complicated mysteries of this night of terrors were not yet unraveled. The work of the rescuer was far from being completed. The couch of herbs was empty—Celeste Martinez was gone!

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOST ON THE FRIO.

WHEN Colonel Wellington and Monte Mose secreted themselves in the timber, they both lay down in the bushes to rest.

With the latter, the memory of his supposed fearful crime on the Rio Medina rendered him at times frantic.

He knew that he had left San Antonio in an intoxicated condition, and he faintly remembered the ride, and being grateful to the Mexicans for laying him on the grass to rest. Then all had been a wild dream, or a dreary blank. He had awakened from it to find a knife within his hand; and the moonlight, playing upon it, showed the blood-stains upon its blade.

Had Black Ben spoken no word, he would have known that he was a murderer; for the scene before him was nearly a reproduction of what he had seen in his dream. All this was rushing in upon him and crazing him now, while the colonel hurried him into the thicket.

The latter was filled with a terrible anxiety in regard to his child; but he had hopes that the scouts and the Tonkaway would soon arrive, and go on the trail to save his darling from the merciless bandits.

Colonel Wellington did not in the least believe the assertions of Mose with reference to his connection with El Negro Bravo, but attributed his wild talk to the blow that he had received on the head from the Greaser's carbine.

As the two men lay in the darkness, suffering both mental and physical agony, Mose suddenly remembered the face and the words of the poor girl whom he had attempted to defend. Springing up, he asked his companion:

"What is your name, sir?"

"My name is Wellington; John Wellington," was the reply.

"And your daughter who has been captured—what is her name?"

"Flora," said the old man. "She is an adopted daughter only; but as dear to me as though she were my own child."

"Flora—Flora Wellington—F. W. I have it!" he exclaimed, as he sprang to his feet. "Colonel Wellington, that girl's face has been photographed upon my brain for nearly a year. She is my guardian angel!"

And Mose related to his interested listener the humiliating circumstances that had occurred in the mesquites between San Antonio and San Pedro Springs.

"This is not news to me," said Colonel Wellington. "Flora told me of it at the time. So that was you?"

"Colonel," said the young man, "I had but a glimpse of your daughter's face, then; and again to-night by moonlight. I cannot tell you what she is to me. Do not suppose that I have fallen in love with her, for in San Antonio lives the idol of my heart, Celeste Martinez, whom I have made wretched!"

At this moment the sound of a rifle-shot was heard. Colonel Wellington sprang to his feet, but before he could collect his thoughts the woods were filled with wild war-whoops, while the ground trembled as the Comanches dashed toward the ranch.

They heard the horrified cries of Aunt Huld and Pic, as they were discovered and dragged from the cabin by the Indians. Mose struggled to break from the thicket, in a mad

attempt to save them, but was held back by the colonel.

"Now is our time," said the latter, a few minutes later. "The attention of the savages is drawn to the cabin. Our only hope is to reach the corral, steal two of the horses, circle the cabin at a distance, and find the trail of the bandits. We can do nothing if we remain here. Come, my young friend; I know you will assist in the rescue of my child!"

"You are right, Colonel Wellington; I will save her, or die in the attempt. Come; I am with you!"

So saying, they both stole through the shades, on their way to the corral, with the result that we have seen.

"*Santissima Maria!*"

This ejaculation burst from the lips of Celeste, as she opened her eyes in the loft of the herder's hut, soon after the departure of her preserver, the Tonkaway. For one moment she sat bewildered. Then, as the wild, piercing war-cries of the Comanches struck upon her ears, all the past horrors, and present and future dangers burst upon her mind; and at the first, she was unable to decide what was best to be done.

For the past three days and nights, the young girl had been in constant anxiety, fear, and enforced action. She now felt that her lover must be lost to her forever; that he had been captured by the Indians, that even now, he might be dead. She had seen him in the company of fiendish bandits. She had witnessed their hellish plotting against him. She had seen the noble attempt to rescue that beautiful girl whom El Negro Bravo had torn from her home. She herself had, since then, saved a man from the knife of a cowardly Mexican; but this man, it would seem, had deserted her. He had left her to the mercy of savage foes. She knew that one of the half-bent over her, and gathered her hair in his hand; even now she seemed to see the steel flashing in her eyes.

How had she been saved from death? How did she come here? Who had carried her to the hut?

The dizzy maze of ideas that flitted before her mind's eye, born of the events which had transpired since she left her home, required subtlety of intellect to link together, and form anything like a reasonable conclusion.

Celeste Martinez was self-willed and reckless to a fault; blind also to the weaknesses of the man she loved, being ready to brave any danger for him, as we have seen. Yet, as she sat in that lone dark hut, on the far frontier, and heard the demon yells of the Comanches near at hand, she felt that she had gone too far, and longed to be with the loved ones she had left.

Hearing, as she thought, the sound of footsteps approaching nearer, she bent over the edge of the loft, filled with terror; but this soon gave place to another feeling.

There, within six feet of the hut, was the man for whom she had risked and suffered so much—Monte Mosel. And, by his side, was the same gray-haired man she had seen, dead or dying, on the lawn!

"*Madre de Dios!*" came from her lips in a hoarse whisper, and then she strove to cry out, and to throw herself from the loft, but tongue and limb refused their duty, and the next moment the two men had started toward the corral.

Now, she thought, her lover might escape. No doubt he and his comrade were being pursued by the Indians; and had she weakly called out, Mosel would have lingered by her side and been captured. She saw that he had been wounded, and she felt sure it had not been by the Comanches. He had been true to himself—that much was evident—and had not deserted to the bandits. He had received his wound in trying to prevent the murder of the ranchero, in whose company he now was. It must be so. Thus she reasoned.

Celeste listened for a moment, and heard no sound of approach, or any further commotion from the cabin. She then sprung from the bed of herbs to the floor, and gazed out into the woods. All was now silent in the timber. She could hear but the sound of one voice, which she judged to be that of an Indian. Looking toward the corral, she saw Mosel and his companion flitting from one clump of bushes to another, and but a short distance from the hut she observed a strangely decorated savage who seemed to be in pursuit of them.

Only one glimpse did Celeste catch of this

brave; but she saw the turtle and the eagle-feathers, and recognized the warrior who had preceded the scouts at the ford.

Upon second thought she was also positive that this was the very Indian who had stood over her with knife in hand. He did not belong to the Comanches—this she knew—for he had arrived in advance of them, and from a different direction, and seemed to be in company with the scouts.

All this argument in the favor of the lurking red-man vanished, as the latter darted toward the corral, rousing the energies and the fears of Celeste as to the safety of her lover, and she flew like a frightened deer through the timber to the place where she had left her mustang.

With a bound, the young girl mounted, forgetful of her lame and stiffened frame, and pointed for the north side of the corral, keeping a thick motto in line between herself and the cabin, at the same time taking care to hold firmly in her hand the carbine which the chief had considerately left on the loft by her side. Riding along, the Castilian girl gained a position that commanded a view to the west of the corral, and also to the north line of the pickets to which were secured many of the mustangs of the war-party. To her joy, she now saw her lover and his comrade gallop away upon two of the horses of the Indians; but this was soon changed to deep concern, when a score of Comanches, with ringing yells, started in pursuit of the two white men.

While making ready to charge in between the Indians and their intended victims, for the purpose of delaying and confusing the former, without a thought in regard to her own peril, Celeste was again astonished by the appearance of the warrior in eagle-feathers and with the turtle totem, speeding around the corral upon a snorting, terrified steed, and planting himself directly in front of the yelling horde of savages. Here was a new turn to the already inexplicable state of affairs. But her astonishment was increased to see that the Comanches had suddenly halted; that, numerous as they were, they appeared to be completely appalled at the sight of the lone red horseman, and her heart was filled with joy and gratitude when she observed the savages whirl their ponies and return at once to the ranch.

Greatly puzzled as to the strange proceedings of the superb and haughty-looking warrior who seemed to be ever turning up upon critical occasions, Celeste remained stationary, herself and her mustang unseen, and watched her lover and his aged companion, as they disappeared in the timber, while the Indian followed.

What did this all mean? There was, indeed, a possibility—nay, even a probability—that this Indian, who must be a chief, wished to have the glory of killing the two white men to himself, and had ordered these braves back, thinking thus to secure their scalps unaided.

This was the only conclusion at which the young girl could arrive; still she was not fully satisfied that she had rightly judged the character of the lone rider, and she determined to frustrate any and all attempts against the lives and liberty of Mosel and the old man.

Thus resolved, the brave girl urged her mustang in chase, but soon found herself, to her great grief and perplexity, hopelessly lost within the deep gloom and dark tangled shades of the Frio bottom-timber.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BANDIT CAMP.

When Flora Wellington saw both her father and the stranger who had come to her rescue, senseless on the ground, and then found herself grasped roughly by the bandit chief, she fainted; and when she came to herself, all the dread events of the night were brought instantly to her mind, by realizing that she was being borne away in the arms of the wretch whom she supposed to be the universally dreaded El Negro Bravo.

From the motion of the horse, she judged that they must be going at a great speed; but she dared not open her eyes, for she had already seen the brutal face of her captor, and his voice had filled her with horror. So she feigned unconsciousness, to give herself time for her thoughts and plannings.

When the Mestizo had fallen, after her shot, and the bandits rushed around the cabin, she had, even in her extreme terror, noticed that none of the ruffian crew had approached the silent, bleeding form of her father. Therefore, she had hopes that he still might live.

The continual alarms and dangers through which she had recently passed, caused her to be less concerned as to her personal safety; and she found herself planning escape in such a cool manner, that her unconcern in regard to her present personal peril was a surprise to herself.

Flora reasoned that Antonio, whom she had observed with the bandits, had informed the latter of the danger they were in from a projected raid upon the ranch by the Comanches at any moment; and the presence of the body of the spy, killed by Turtle, had been conclusive evidence of this. Hence El Negro Bravo had hastened from the vicinity, without doing further harm.

Thoughts, too, of their faithful negro servants came to her mind. Even if her shot had not been heard in the camp of the Comanches, the absence of the spy would cause them to suspect something wrong, and proceed down the Rio Frio to investigate it.

Next, Flora thought of the young man she had seen with the bandits. She was puzzled to decide where she had previously met him. The great and perplexing mystery of it all was, how came he in such company? He was not confined as a prisoner, and seemed to be one of the bandits; but he had sprung at once to defend her from the attack of El Negro Bravo.

Flora then thought of her noble friend, Turtle, the Tonkaway, who had gone for help, and her heart swelled with hope, as she felt confident that he would come to her rescue, even did he not find the scouts for whom he had gone. She was not, however, without fears that he might fall into the hands of the Comanches.

If this should happen, she felt that she was lost forever; for Turtle was the only man versed in prairie lore who would know what steps to take for her release, by deciding from the signs about the ranch what party had taken her captive, should the war-party arrive before the chief could return.

With these thoughts flitting through her brain, Flora began, also, to think of the expected arrival of Clarence Carleton, and she felt a strange dread lest he should reach there, only to lose his life at the hand of the Indians. That he would be sacrificed while on a mission for her benefit. While dwelling upon this subject, and striving to crush down the feelings of deep interest in this man whom she had never seen, she opened her eyes.

Great was her surprise and joy to see the top of a blasted oak, which she remembered, outlined against the sky. She now knew that the bandits had crossed the ford, and turned up the river westerly, for they were now going across the same trail that had been made by the Comanches when chasing the Tonkaway chief.

Soon after making this discovery, she saw, above her head, the thick branches of the bottom timber. Here the bandit chief came to a halt, ordering his followers to press on further, find an opening, and encamp.

"Spread out, muchachos!" yelled El Negro Bravo, in a voice of stern command, as they seemed to hesitate. "We'll camp right here, Pedro, and be safe from the reds. Come and take my beauty down, and look sharp that she doesn't scratch. She's a regular tigress, as you may know from the way she blazed away at Juan."

"Is the diablo senorita not dead?" asked Pedro.

"I hope not," replied the bandit chief, as he alighted. "I have gone too far to get her in my power to be willing to see her slip the trail at the moment of success."

"May I ask, senior capitan, why her life will benefit the Chaparral Cocks, and her death be a loss to us?"

"Pedro," said El Negro Bravo, angrily, "from your words and manner I should judge that you have been thinking of using your cuchillo on the senorita. But just let me say that any man who meditates harm to this girl had better say his prayers, for I will certainly make daylight shine through any one who harms a hair of her head. Do you understand that? If so, you may go and inform the band to that effect. I shall make no explanations further than what I have made to Antonio, as to why I am so particular in this matter, or in what manner she is to be a benefit to our band. Time will tell. Now, light out. Bring some wood and start a fire. I am nearly famished, and must have food and rest, if the whole Comanche nation was in sight of us."

Flora Wellington dreaded the secret knife of the assassin far more than she did the open anger of El Negro Bravo. The latter soon found that his beautiful captive was feigning unconsciousness, and he laughed aloud.

"By St. Iago! You'd make a star actress, my little prairie bird. Your heart is on a stake; but don't fret; I'll protect you. You're all right now, and will be fresh and rosy after a short rest and a lunch."

As the bandit chief spoke, Flora slowly raised her head, opening her eyes; but as the face of her captor was in darkness, she could not read the exultation and admiration that was stamped upon his brutal features.

El Negro Bravo slowly lowered his head, as if to kiss her, when, with her very soul in her eyes stirred with repulsion, she gathered all her strength and struck him full in the face. At the same time she sprang upward, suddenly overturning the startled outlaw upon the sword, and stood over him with the fire of fury in her eyes.

The outlaw chief lay on his back, filled at first with astonishment at the wonderful strength of the delicate girl, and the quickness of her movements. At this instant Pedro approached with the wood he had collected for a fire, and as he broke through the bushes he came suddenly opposite them.

Ashamed to be seen by one of his men in an humbled position, as he knew that Pedro would look with contempt upon a man who had been prostrated by a blow from a woman, El Negro Bravo sprang to his feet, exclaiming, as if he had not noticed the Mexican:

"By St. Iago! You do it up brown, my little lady. As I just had occasion to remark, you'll make a star actress; and when you and I have run through the cash your old foil of a grandfather, old Carrolton, left us, I'll put you on the boards. Then you'll be in your element."

"Who, in the name of wonder, are you?" she cried, "that you talk thus to me? What do you know of my family?"

"Who do you think honors you by risking his life in your welfare?" asked the outlaw, in a sarcastic tone, at the same time indicating to Pedro to proceed with his labor.

"I suppose," retorted Flora, "that I am forced to stand in the presence of the blood-stained cowardly bandit called El Negro Bravo, who is so vile that he cannot find white men so depraved as to associate with him, but must affiliate with the lowest half-breed assassins of the Rio Grande, or else do his black deeds alone. And I ask you, forced as I am to hold converse with you, how you knew the name of my grandfather, and why you presume to link yourself with my future in any way?"

As Flora spoke, a terrible fear entered her mind in regard to the answer that would be made to her.

"By St. Iago, my beauty, you ride a high horse! I'm thinking however that your steed will shrink to a diminutive burro before I get through with you. It is strange that you are so ignorant of my real name and character, for I believe I wrote to your guardian, old Wellington, that he might expect me at his ranch about this time. Is it possible that he never informed you?"

Flora now gazed at the outlaw chief in increased perplexity. The light from the fire, which Pedro had kindled, shone full upon his face, with all its play of evil passions.

"You wrote to my guardian?" she said, in an incredulous tone. "If so, why did you come with armed men to his dwelling? Why did you order your *avant courier* to bury his knife in my guardian's heart? And why have you torn me from his corpse—the corpse of the only friend I have ever known?"

The young girl dared not ask the name of her captor, for she felt sure that Colonel Wellington had been duped in regard to family matters in New York; and that El Negro Bravo, and the Quixotic Clarence Carrolton were one and the same person. It was absurd to suppose that the real Carrolton had been murdered by this wretch, having previously told him minutely of his affairs.

"It is all in a nut-shell, my little wild-flower," at length answered the bandit chief. "I have deceived old Wellington in regard to the property. Old Carrolton left his entire estate to you; and, as I was his confidential clerk, I formed the plan of drawing up and forging another will, which would give me the property, I being an adopted son, changing my name by request of the testator, your beloved

and venerable ancestor, from Clarence Carter to Clarence Carrolton. This last happy thought of mine made everything seem smooth and reasonable. Now, you have the beginning of the affair. I then got control of the entire immense fortune, my cleverly gotten up papers to substantiate the will having passed muster. But, within a short time, detectives who had been employed to work up the case, unearthed the old will. I was under the impression that I had destroyed the cursed thing, but you see, I had been drunk most of the time, and so made a most infernal mess of it. That's the only way to account for my having slipped up on such an important part of the proceeding. That precious old guardian of yours has been the prime worker in the investigation. It was he who set the detectives at work, and his attorney in New York now has the original will of old Carrolton.

Seeing that I must inevitably be ousted, I conceived the very original plan of marrying the heiress—your pretty self, you know—and winning the stakes in spite of everything. This was my second game, and I think I have shuffled the cards, and given myself a hand that is pretty certain to sweep everything around the board.

"I wanted first to corral you, and get old Wellington out of the way, but I didn't care to have his blood on my own hands—it would hardly be the thing, you see, as I intended marrying his adopted daughter—so I engaged the valuable services of this band of Mexican outlaws from their chief, El Negro Bravo as he is called, for a week or so, to assist me in carrying out my pious plans. How well I have succeeded thus far you know very well, to your sorrow—or to your happiness, if you like that better—and you must have seen, by this time, that I am not a party who will stand any very great amount of fooling or bosh. Now, that has been all pretty well managed so far, as I believe you will agree with me.

"I think my explanation clear and concise, at all events, Miss Flora Frazier, or Wellington, by whichever name you choose to call yourself. You understand, I hope, that I am Clarence Carrolton, of New York, very much at your charming service. I am very happy, for my own part, to meet you; and I need hardly say that I regret exceedingly the unpleasant events that were necessary to give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. I have come a pretty long distance with the view, the express purpose in fact, of making you my wife; and if I live a week longer, which I think I stand a reasonable show of doing, I shall do so in spite of your very fascinating willfulness, even if the devil and all his imps were following close on my trail.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAIL DISCOVERED.

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat!" And Big Foot wiped out his rifle and tore off a huge chew of tobacco.

The scouts were standing on the lawn in front of the cabin, amid the dead and dying Indians, all panting with the exertion and the excitement caused by their recent fight with the Comanches.

"I never," pears ter me, war in sich a mixed up biz afore. Fust, ther yaller kites o' ther Bravo tore ther Flower o' ther Frio plum off'n ther parient stem afore we 'roved; an' that sot me back a heap. Then Mister New Yoruck had ter flop hisself, 'peariently, inter kingdom come, an' we hed ter git up an' git ter kiver, ter save our ha'r. Hlt never 'gred with me ter lay low when ther reds war yellin' in my ears, an' my shooter handy; but we-ans got a show 'fore 'twas through with. But, pards, I heerd some car'ous sorter yells mixed up with ther music o' ther reds; and ther Tonk' hev bin sasbayin' round so permiscus like thet I suspicion he knows 'bout how ther hull capoodle hev bin a-runnin' all ther time."

"There's been several cards played in the game," answered Ben, "that we don't know the color of, to say nothing about the spots."

"I reckon we've shot the spots out of some of them," said Joe. "How do you like your first frontier experience, Lord Carrolton?"

Big Foot glanced at Clarence as Reckless Joe, in his usual highly dramatic manner, put this question to him.

"Hal hal!" laughed the old scout; "Mister Carrolton hev hed a heap o' fun, right from ther word go. He hev bin lassoed by a Greaser, got a fall off'n his nag, bin dragged

through ther Frio by ther Tonk', an' hed his ears tickled listenin' ter ther Curmanch' operas. Hain't we got a han'some lay-out of reds, Carrolton, or does yer feel bad lookin' at 'em?"

"It is a terrible sight, of course," said the young man; "but if we had not shot 'em, it would have soon been all up with us. Is there no such thing as civilizing this tribe, Mr. Wallace?"

"Wa-al," was the old scout's reply, "ef you'd gi'n me my ch'ice 'tween ther Curmanches, 'Paches, an' all ther rattlesnakes 'tween this an' Pika's Peak, fer civilizin', I'd take my chances with ther rattlers every time, and bet my doubloons on hit."

"Gentlemen," said Clarence, "my mind is nearly distracted when I think of the peril of the Wellingtons in the power of such men as was Antonio. Thanks to you, boys, he at least will never throw another rope. But we must save the colonel and his daughter, if such a thing is possible. Do you think that the Mexicans and Indians are in league with each other?"

"No such thing in the cards," replied Fighting Ben, who now stood watching out for the return of the Tonkaway. "If the Comanches should strike the trail of the bandits, they would buck ag'in' them, you may depend. I am not certain but what they would have been in pursuit of the Greasers at this moment if we had not stood in their way."

"Yes; but Miss Wellington would be worse off then than she is now," said Clarence. "The Mexicans cannot be as cruel and inhuman, bad as they are, as the Comanches."

"Not quite so bad," returned Ben. "But, as I said before, don't you bet on finding as much humanity in a Rio Grande bandit as you can in a black wolf of the Llanos."

"But why should they carry away the colonel and his daughter when they are landed together principally, if not entirely, for the purpose of stealing horses and cattle?"

"This is a singular lay-out," said Ben, in a puzzled manner. "The guerrillas do not, as a general thing, make war on women; but, as you say, make a business of driving away all the loose stock about the ranches. However, I reckon the Tonkaway has read the sign, and will explain many things when he gets his tongue loose. Here he comes! We shall soon know his opinion of affairs."

Turtle at this moment stalked from the timber, having just returned from the herder's hut, where he had discovered that the young girl whom he had left in the left was gone, leaving no sign as to what had been her fate.

The chief appeared before the scouts, and stood in the moonlight gazing up the river; but his stoical face told nothing of the thoughts that rushed through his brain, nothing of the strange events that had transpired, of which his white friends were ignorant; nothing of the deep concern that he felt on account of the capture by the bandits of the beautiful girl who had nursed him from the borders of the death-trail back to life!

"Glad yer hes skipped back, Tonk', mighty glad," said Big Foot. "Thar's bin no countin' on when yer would show up in this cirkus 'nough fer us ter see ther color o' yer paint. Howsomever, yer kin skin ther heads an' welcome, fer I knows yer hates ter lose ther ha'r of a Comanche; an' when thet job are did, we'd like right smart ter know what yer think o' ther Greasers what tuck ther leetle gal, an' 'bout ther gin'ral program'."

At the mention of scalps the chief quickly sprang among the dead and secured the trophies, which he stripped off in a way that showed that he was no novice, to the cattle of his saddle. He then returned his knife to its sheath, and exclaimed:

"El Negro Bravo steal Flower of Frio. Turtle say his death yell will ring before moon grow small. A Tonkaway chief does not lie. Turtle's tongue is not forked."

"Thet explains some things," said the old scout. "Boys, I c'd swaller a catfish tail first, with pure mad! El Negro Bravo are a white what mixes with Greasers. Thet are, he slings English lingo, an' war born under ther tail-feathers o' ther 'Merican eagle. But he are a dark-skinned, black-hearted mongrel son of a kiote. I kinder sees things now. Go ahead, Tonk', an' spit out all yer knows 'bout ther case."

Turtle, in the peculiar manner of an Indian who has mixed somewhat with the whites, went on to explain more fully.

"El Negro Bravo come to rancho. Want

Flower of Frio. Got heap Mexicans. Knock white hair chief on head. Knock strange white man off mustang. El Negro Bravo steal Flower of Frio. Turtle kill spy before go for scouts. Mexican know red-men in woods. Know Flower of Frio shoot rifle. Know Comanche hear. Comanche come quick. No want fight war-party. Ride over ford. Turtle see trail. Antonio come back on trail. Know white scouts come soon. Antonio bring lasso. Hide in bush. Throw lasso over New York man. Pull off mustang. Try kill with knife. White squaw in bush. Strange white squaw. Dress like warrior. Got gun. Got six shoot. She fire at Antonio. He fall in Frio. Crawl up bank. Scouts shoot him. Comanche sound war-cry. Scouts ride over river. Turtle go in bush. Find New York man. Find white squaw. Both heap sick. Know nothing. Braves see white squaw trail. Turtle take white squaw to hut in woods. She heap sick. Turtle go help white hair chief. Turtle fight Comanche. Now go find white squaw. White squaw gone."

The scouts listened to this with the greatest attention.

"Whar did ther strange white man come from that ther Greasers knocked blind? Whar are his corpus? Whar did ther strange white gal in men's clothes come from? Whar are she gone, and whar are ther ole curnil?"

As Big Foot asked these questions in a rapid manner, the tone of his voice showing great astonishment, he scratched his head in evident perplexity; while Fighting Ben and Reckless Joe gazed at each other in wonder, and the face of Carrolton was full of the deepest interest—all being impressed by the strange assertions of Turtle, who now replied to the old scout:

"Greasers ride over Frio. White hair chief heap sick, but wake up. Strange white man wake up. Both men hide. Yellow Bear make big talk with braves. Then white hair steal horse. Strange man steal horse. Ride up Frio. Turtle make Comanche heap 'fraid then go for scalp. White squaw go."

"Dog-gone everything my half-sister ever owned!" cried Big Foot, greatly surprised. "That beats everything I ever heard on. Boys, ther ole curnil are on ther war-path with a hull sculp. That news are worth a hundred nags. Who ther thunderation are ther gal what saved yer from gittin' hashed by Antonio does yer 'magine, Carrolton? An' what are she sashayin' 'round in men's fixin's fer? With all ther Tonk's 'splainin' of things, I'm a-gittin' mixed an' mixed, dog'd ef I hain't!"

"Well, boys," said Ben, presently, "there is no use in setting up a riddle-shop. I think the way is clear enough to bet on, with a fair show for our money; but we must play for one stake at a time. The facts of the case are, that there is a young lady in the power of a gang of unscrupulous villains not many miles from us; and two white men, wounded at that, in the timber and liable to be captured and tortured at any moment. Two helpless negroes perhaps being butchered at this moment, and an unknown brave and fearless girl wandering in these woods without a protector. Which shall we endeavor to save first? For my own part, I say, let us to the rescue of Flora Wellington!"

"Thet are hitting ther nail squar' on ther head," agreed Big Foot. "We'll ford, an' see what p'int they've struck for."

Reckless Joe, who had disappeared suddenly after he saw that things were soon to be decided, now advanced from the kitchen, which had escaped a visit from the Comanches, with both hands and mouth full of roast turkey; the last of poor Aunt Huld's cooking.

Holding a huge drum-stick in the air, Joe exclaimed:

"Plan out the campaign, me lord dukes! I am with you to the death. But while life lasts, and grub holds out, I'll cater to me stomach's wants. I'll now mount me noble steed, and be ready to gallop through fire and blood to the rescue of the fair lady of Wellington Castle."

"White scouts wait here. Turtle look trail El Negro Bravo."

With these words, the chief sprung upon his horse, and galloped toward the ford. The scouts, guided by Reckless Joe, hastened to the kitchen, where they devoured a lunch without much ceremony; and returned to the lawn; Carrolton being in a most perplexing frame of mind, since he had ascertained that his life had been saved by a young girl, unknown to all of them, and who was probably now in great danger, while he was powerless to assist her. His

duty called him to the rescue of Flora Wellington, and also to the assistance of this brave girl; so his mind was in anything but a state to be envied.

As the scout appeared, Turtle galloped up, calling out:

"El Negro Bravo rides to sunset."

No sooner had these words left the lips of the Tonkaway than the war-whoop of the Comanches sounded from up the Rio Frio.

The old scout looked at Turtle, who now exclaimed:

"Yellow Bear heap mad. Lose many warriors. Come back for pale-face scalps. Want more fight."

"Boys, we-uns must git up an' git. But if we follows ther trail ther reds 'll catch us, dead sure. What's ter be did, Tonk'?"

"Ride in bottom-woods this side Frio," said the chief. "Comanche think white man gone over river on trail."

"Good for you, Tonk! Yer head's level every time. Come on, boys. We've got ter do some fine work now, er we're gone coons, yer may bet yer lives," said Big Foot Wallace.

There was no time for parley, no opportunity for such a thing as second thought. The Comanches must be fast approaching them. Mounting hurriedly, the scouts spurred after the Tonkaway chief, who led them into the river-bottom by a cow-path until they reached the stream. Then they turned up, riding parallel with the same, and halting suddenly in the dark shades of the timber to hear the galloping war-party as it thundered down past them in the direction of Wellington ranch, eager for their blood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TURTLE TO THE RESCUE.

WE will now return to the camp of El Negro Bravo, whom we left as he had finished proclaiming himself to Flora Wellington as none other than Clarence Carrolton.

So reasonable was the wretch's explanation, which showed such an intimate knowledge of the family affairs of herself, that the young girl had no doubt that the man before her was the same who had written from New York to the old colonel.

And now, who was there in the wide world who could help her in her hour of need and rescue her from the power of this confessed villain? There were none. Yet, stay! She had forgotten, for the moment, her faithful friend, the Tonkaway chief. Flora knew that, if Turtle lived, he would go through fire for her, that he would fight like a fiend to save her if he only knew—as soon he must—the great peril she was in. She knew that it would be madness for the chief to attempt a rescue by force, but she had the greatest confidence in his strategy, and some hope as well that he would meet with the scouts he had gone in search of.

As El Negro Bravo brought his lying explanation to an end, he turned to the fire to conceal the devilish delight that he knew must be revealed in his face; for he realized that he would have a very difficult task before him if the young girl had the slightest suspicion that his story was false.

He now knew that Clarence Carrolton could not have sent his photograph to the ranch; for, if that had been the case, his captive would have known directly that he was not the New Yorker. Handing her a tin cup of coffee, which Pedro had just finished preparing, he said:

"Cheer up, my dear girl! Things are looking up with you, and there is no occasion to despond. You have been hived up on that ranch too long. I will give you a run to the States. We shall roll in wealth, and you shall see the world. I'm a little rough, but you needn't rub against my ragged edges. I advise you to eat and drink now, for we may have a long run from the Indians before we get to a civilized part of the country."

While the bandit chief was speaking, Flora sat upon the bank, wrapped in her thoughts, which were gloomy in the extreme, and giving no attention to the words of her captor.

In her eyes was a far-away look, changing suddenly to a desperate glare which El Negro Bravo did not like; but he refrained from making any further remarks, and seated himself by the food which Pedro brought him.

At this moment, one of the band entered the thicket from the plain in some excitement, and exclaimed:

"Los Comanches are at the ranch, Senor Capitan! There has been much firing of guns."

"Bueno! Is that so? We played a fine game on them, and got the scouts in a tight fix. I only hope the reds will scalp the last infernal one of them."

Had the outlaw chief glanced at Flora as he spoke, he would have seen her eyes flash, and her whole manner change from hopeless despair to eager joy. But, for once, he had permitted his tongue to have too free action, without thinking of the ears that were drinking in every word he uttered in his self gratulation.

Calling Pedro to his side, he now whispered:

"Have you seen Antonio?"

"No, senor!"

"I sent him back to run a knife into the hearts of Monte Mose and old Wellington, and not to leave the ranch until he was sure that both were dead. Keep an eye out for him, and send him to me when he arrives; but I should not be surprised to find that he had been fool enough to lie in wait for Carrolton, and get a ball in his brain."

Raising his voice, the bandit chief now asked:

"Where are our boys camped, Pedro?"

"At an opening, not a pistol-shot from here, Senor Capitan."

"All right. We are in a good position, and can make a streak over the Rio Frio, should the reds come upon our trail. I'll bet a thousand to one those scouts will lose their scalps. Pedro, help yourself to grub, and then go and keep a good look-out on the river trail. Lopez, you can go to camp; your time is up. We are safe until morning, and then we will scout."

Pedro left as directed; but, as he entered the bushes, he gave a murderous glance toward Flora, which was observed by El Negro Bravo, and which set him to thinking.

Lopez walked away to join his comrades in the camp, and the chief was left alone with his fair captive.

After Pedro's departure, El Negro Bravo remembered that he had been a pard of the Mestizo who had been shot by Flora at the ranch; and he now felt a strong suspicion that Pedro meditated foul play against the young lady. He wished, however to avoid any difficulty. He had collected this band for the very purpose which he had now accomplished; and if he now evaded the scouts and the Indians, he would have no further need of their services, the heiress being in his power. He had already decided that, in the event of his camp being attacked, he would make his escape with Flora, leaving the Chaparral Cocks to fight it out as best they could.

It was this decision that had caused him to camp at some distance from the main band. He now kept a close watch upon the circle of firelight, and also upon Flora, who, much to his pleasure, seemed to have accepted the situation, for she had begun to eat of the food before her.

"Pardon my seeming rudeness, Miss Flora Frazier," said the chief, now approaching her; "but I must, to prevent your rambling in the soft moonlight, secure you to this tree; but it shall be with silken bonds. Would that I could bind your fate to mine in a legal way as easily! But do not despond. Our nuptials shall soon be celebrated with eclat."

With these words, El Negro Bravo loosed the red silk sash from his own waist, and secured it about the wrists of Flora. He then tied the fringed ends around the trunk of the tree; the fair girl making no movement whatever.

"That's right, my little lady! You might as well accept things in a quiet way. You are fancy free, and I'm not a bad-looking fellow for a husband. I advise you now, to catch a few winks of sleep; for, as I previously remarked, we may be obliged to mount and away at any moment."

Seeing that Flora appeared to take no notice of his remarks, the outlaw stole away into the thicket near the horses.

Cautiously he made his way up the branches of a pecan tree, and gained a position from which he could watch and guard over the girl upon whose welfare so much depended.

He had been in his perch but a short time when he was conscious of a slight rustle in the bushes, but a few yards distant. With his eyes fixed upon a moonlit space between the thicket and his fair captive, he soon saw a sight which filled his coward heart with fear and apprehension. Slowly, like a gorged snake, he saw a dark, human form crawling on hands

and knees toward the foot of the pecan in which he was; and as this form reached the moonlight, through which it had to pass, it half arose and peered suspiciously around in all directions.

A shudder ran through the frame of the bandit chief, for he recognized, by the eagle feathers and turtle totem, the much dreaded Tonkaway chief, who had, by his presence at Wellington ranch, caused the abandonment of one of his plans.

Well did El Negro Bravo know the terrible revenge this Tonkaway would inflict upon any one who harmed one of the Wellington family; for, through his spies, Antonio and Augustine, he had gained full knowledge of the Indian's fidelity to those who had befriended him, and also of his great courage, strength, and skill in the use of arms.

The fact, that Turtle was the man who had gone down the river after the scouts, flashed through the mind of the bandit chief. Augustine had told him this; and his presence now proved that the scouts must have cut their way through the Comanches, and found his trail.

Now, when the grand object, for which he had worked so long, and to accomplish which he had outlawed himself in the Lone Star State—now, when millions were within his grasp, must he be beaten by an Indian?

With grating teeth, and his knife grasped tightly, El Negro Bravo swore that he would win or die!

So astonished was he at the sudden appearance of the Tonkaway chief on the scene, which proved that the scouts were near at hand, that for a moment he was paralyzed with insane fury; and, during that moment, the Indian had glided to the foot of the tree beneath him.

Conscious that one false movement would ruin all, El Negro Bravo kept his position, giving a quick glance toward the point where he had stationed Pedro on guard. He saw, to his surprise, the Mexican crawling through the bushes, with his long knife between his teeth. The bandit chief well knew that the Greaser was stealing forward to murder Flora Wellington, and he chuckled with glee to think that the Tonkaway would soon be engaged with him in deadly conflict. Thus, congratulating himself on the favorable turn his luck had taken, the outlaw now glanced downward and saw Turtle cut the silken sash that bound Flora; and, at the same time, he heard him mutter:

"Flower of Frio run to river. Maybe so see white hair chief. Maybe so see scouts. Maybe so see New York man. Flower of Frio trust Turtle."

As the Tonkaway spoke thus in a low tone, he suddenly showed that he had caught the sound of something suspiciously perilous to himself and Flora, and, peeping through the branches, it was evident to the outlaw that the Indian had caught a glimpse of Pedro as he came creeping across the bar of moonlight, with hatred in his fierce eyes and the glittering steel in his mouth.

No criminal on the scaffold, with the death-noose about his neck, ever felt more joy and relief on receiving a reprieve, than did Flora Wellington when the eagle-feathers of Turtle the Tonkaway kissed her cheek; when her bonds were cut, and the low welcome words gave her the knowledge that her father still lived, and that Clarence Carrolton—the real, *bona fide* Clarence Carrolton—was with the scouts.

The story told her by the bandit chief had been a sheer fabrication; and she was now so overwhelmed with this avalanche of joy, that she lay for a moment, after being released from her bonds, unable to move.

Turtle crept a few paces beyond the tree, and in the path of Pedro, the latter advancing toward Flora, who had not observed his approach.

El Negro Bravo, now seeing that the attention of all was occupied, stealthily stepping from the branch upon which he had been supported to a sapling, slipped noiselessly down its trunk to the earth.

On came Pedro, until within ten paces of his intended victim, when Flora, catching sight of his brutal, creeping form, sprung to her feet; at the same instant the Mexican raised himself erect, and, with knife in hand, rushed toward her.

With her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth, and her blood freezing in her veins with horror, the poor girl saw the stalwart form of the Tonkaway chief bound through the air, saw

Indian and Mexican writhing in a fearful, deadly conflict, saw the red blood spurting in the clear silvery moonlight, and then, filled with terror, and with a prayer on her lips for the safety of her brave preserver, she ran with the speed of an antelope toward the river.

Not ten paces had Flora Wellington taken, however, when she found herself clasped in the arms of El Negro Bravo, who, thrusting a wad of buckskin into her mouth, clasped her firmly, and the next moment the wretched girl found herself seated upon a horse, while the bandit chief, mounted upon another fleet mustang, led the animal to which he had secured her, through the dark timber toward the west.

Thus, not five minutes after having received from the lips of Turtle the Tonkaway, the glad tidings of the safety of her friends and rescue at hand for herself, when feeling that she was being set free from the bandit hordes, and would soon clasp her arms about her loved guardian's neck, she was once more bounding over the prairie in the fair moonlight, alone, with the cunning El Negro Bravo, whose coarse chuckling laugh of exultation and self-gratulation seemed to her the last drop in an overwhelming sea of hopeless misery!

CHAPTER XXVII.

COMANCHES ON THE BANDIT TRAIL.

WHEN the thundering charge of the war-party, as for the second time, they dashed toward Wellington Ranch died out in the distance, Turtle the Tonkaway turned to the scouts, who sat their horses in the thick bottom, and exclaimed:

"Comanches no find white scout. Stay burn ranch. Stay hide dead braves. Then find trail over river. Then ride fast for Mexican camp. Scouts go in bush. Turtle go in bush. Turtle crawl in El Negro Bravo camp. Steal Flower of Frio. Maybe so three Mexican keep eye open watch. We kill Mexican with knife. No make death-yell. Then Comanche come. We stay in bush. Let Comanche fight Mexican. When Tonkaway chief talk, words heap good. What scouts say?"

"Wa-al I should asserwate," said the old scout, "thet yer hedn't wasted any gab, Tonk', an' thet every word pans out good solid sense. What does yer say ter this war-council, boys?" and Big Foot tore off a fresh chew of tobacco in an energetic way, that showed he at least was ready and eager to proceed.

"It suits me to a charm," asserted Ben. "Let dog eat dog, if we can play the game that Turtle proposes. We have to sling big cards, and do fine scouting, to play roots on them, and corral Miss Flora; for they will probably be on the look-out for an attack from the reds. If the Comanches make a lunge in the rear of either party, guided by the sound of fire-arms, should we create an alarm, then it would be good-by for every one of us."

"If we can get Miss Flora safely out from their camp," said Carrolton, "I go in for leaving the Mexicans to the tender mercies of the Indians; while we set in, and scour the bottom for the brave girl who risked her life to save mine, and has been, as Ben said just now, so mysteriously mixed up in our lay-out. There is the old colonel also, and his strange comrade, who are both wounded, and must be suffering greatly both in mind and body. We ought to think of them, and do all we can in their behalf."

"In case we do as our aboriginal friend proposes," put in Reckless Joe, "we shall be obliged to leave our nags on the north bank of the Rio Frio, and scout around the bandit camp on foot, and singly."

"Joe talk heap good," agreed the Tonkaway chief.

"Wa-al, boys, I reckon thet program yer hes fixed up will 'bout fit ther case; but I 'vises ter hev Carrolton stick to his critter, an' keep on ther edge o' ther timber, 'bove ther camp. Hit won't take long ter locate ther yaller kiotes; an' they hain't fur off, fer ther animiles war 'bout used up. So Tonk' says, an' he orter know, fer he 'zamed ther sign. Yer see, boys, ef we gits Miss Florry, we'll want a nag ter fotch her over ther drink on. Carrolton would git his wizen split ef he went in on ther crawl with we-uns; fer he hain't used ter twistin' hisself 'round 'among ther bushes like a snake. He kin keep an eye on things, from kiver, without runnin' risks; an' he mought see chances whar he could come in on ther dash, an' do us a heap o' sarvice."

"Big Foot talk heap good. He great scout," was the approving remark of the Tonkaway;

but it was with a look impatience, and a twitch of the jaw-strap, which the old scout interpreted as a hint to be moving.

"Dog-gone this perlaver," he called out, in his most emphatic manner; "hit are all settled. We-uns is ter spread ourselves, es soon as ther smell o' them pepper-eaters strikes our noses. Carrolton, what yer think? Is hit all hunk?"

"I agree to do exactly as you propose," said the New Yorker; "although I do not wish my verdancy to be taken into consideration for a moment, for I am ready to crawl, walk or ride into the camp of the scoundrels, and the sooner I am called on to do it, the better I shall be satisfied. If I can be of more use as you advise, I am ready to take my post; but remember, if I hear anything like shooting, I do not promise to keep it."

As Clarence ceased speaking, Turtle whirled his horse, and went crashing through the bushes, leading the scouts directly out from the timber, in a northerly direction, toward the open plain. Then they all galloped west-erly, parallel with the Rio Frio, until they reached the deserted Comanche camp; this being the point at which Turtle's race for life had terminated, and where his supposed body had been burned at the stake. The object of the chief was to ascertain if the Indians had buried their dead; for he knew that, if such was the case, they would not return to the last resting-place of their slain until they had avenged their deaths.

Should the Comanches succeed in securing a goodly number of scalps, they would no doubt repair to their old camp, bearing the bodies of the warriors who had been killed at Wellington Ranch, and lay all side by side in the earth; after which they would have a death and scalp dance.

The spot where the dead had been buried was found by Big Foot, the Tonkaway being averse to approaching the place; and, knowing that their horses would be safe, the scouts and Turtle now proceeded to the river on foot, Carrolton following upon his mustang as had been agreed upon.

Secreting their rifles in a hollow tree, they then passed over the river by the closely entwined branches of the trees which here formed a complete archway across the stream, Carrolton fording it upon his horse. On reaching the North side of the river, the chief left the scouts while he slyly skulked through the timber to reconnoiter, and in this way ascertain if the Mexicans had passed further up the stream, or were encamped below; he having judged from the trail at the ford, by a close study of the hoof-prints in the soft bank of the river, that the horses of the bandits were very much fagged and nearly broken down by long and continuous travel, and this would necessitate their camping to rest and graze at no distant point.

Much to the disappointment and anxiety of the scouts, the Tonkaway did not return for some length of time; then, in the long peculiar stride of his people, he flitted through the patches of moonlight, and came to a halt in front of them. Then, pointing in the direction from whence he had come, he said in a low tone of satisfaction:

"El Negro Bravo camp there. Two rifle-shots in wood. Four Mexican man watch plain below from bush. Come. Turtle knife jump in sheath. Want fly in Greaser heart. What scout say?"

"Je-ru-si-lum!" muttered Big Foot, in a hoarse whisper. "Everything are turnin' up slick es a fresh eel-skin. Carrolton, jest 'low yer nag ter glide 'long, easy-like up-stream fer a couple o' shoots, an' then make south fer ther edge o' ther timber, an' git whar yer kin squint out over ther perrarer. Hit'll be dog-goned strange ef yer doesn't git a show ter sling yer keerd afore ther game are jerked up a-standin'!"

Before Big Foot had ceased speaking, Ben, Joe and the Tonkaway were, with tightened belts, ready for their lone and perilous ventures through the underbrush; each to crawl upon and kill one of the guards, as previously decided, if possible, and without alarming the main body of the band of outlaws.

Clarence Carrolton guided his horse slowly through the timber, which was lit up here and there by bars and arrows of moonlight, until he reached the position of observation to which the old scout had assigned him.

Turtle pointed out the location of each of the sentinels to the scouts, reserving to himself

the most difficult and dangerous part of the proceedings. This was to worm his way to the tree to which Flora Wellington had been bound, cut her loose, and then kill Pedro, whom he had seen watching the trail toward Wellington Ranch.

The Tonkaway discovered the creeping form of Pedro at the same moment that he cut the sash which bound Flora to the tree, and he whispered in her ear his hasty words of cheer, and directions as to what she must now do; knowing that the least disturbance or outcry would make the young girl's escape very doubtful, even if accompanied by himself, and also that the lives of the scouts would be greatly endangered, scattered as they were, he wormed his way into the thick bushes, supposing that Flora, following his directions, had stolen noiselessly away.

When he first saw the Mexican, as he arose to his feet, and looked toward the tree, Turtle feared that the bandit had caught sight of Flora's vanishing form, and was about to sound an alarm; consequently he gave one gigantic bound, tore his arm around Pedro's neck, placed the palm of his hand over his mouth, and bent his head over backward, at the same time raising his knife in air.

Down came the glittering steel into the breast of the bandit; then, with the strength of an enraged panther, Turtle clasped the writhing form in his arms, preventing any commotion or outcry, and Pedro's life-blood spurted over the mossy bank, upon which, but a minute before, his intended victim had reclined.

Hastily scalping the Greaser, and throwing his body into the thicket, Turtle turned about, seeing nothing to show that Flower of the Frio had been there, with the exception of the silken sash of El Negro Bravo, which he thrust within his belt, and then stood listening intently for any sound which he could interpret as proceeding from human beings. The continuous whisking of the tails and stamping of the hoofs of the horses in the adjacent opening, were such, however, as to prevent his hearing the rustle of the bushes as El Negro Bravo proceeded slowly through the timber along the Rio Frio, with his fair captive and escaped to the plain.

But a short time did the Tonkaway stand by the smoldering fire when Big Foot glided softly to his side.

"I had a hefty scrimmage with my yaller kiote," he whispered; "but I tuck him in outen the wet without a squeal. Whar's yer meat? An' whar's Miss Florry?"

"Mexican in 'bush," replied Turtle, as he pointed toward the corpse of Pedro. "Kick like mule, but no sound death-yell. Flower of Frio run in woods to river. Turtle cut loose from tree. See!" and the Tonkaway held up to Big Foot's view the severed sash.

"Ye'r a brick, Tonk'," said the old scout. "Then ther leetle gal are free as perrarer air! But I hope she'll lay low until ther fandang 'tween ther Greasers an' Curmanches is over. Hello! here's ther boys, sure es shootin'!"

Joe and Ben now joined them, each showing his knife with the suggestive blood-stains, at which pantomime Big Foot waved his sombrero above his head; but the Tonkaway gave a gesture and made a hiss of caution.

Beckoning them to follow, the chief started toward the point at which Pedro had been stationed, but before reaching it he sunk to his knees and went crawling through the thicket, the scouts following him.

"Dog-gone my half sister's black cat!" said Big Foot, "an' ther hull o' her fam'ly without exception! I'm ready fer 'most any game, but I'll hev ter kinder watch this till I gits ther run o' ther keards."

"By my royal buttons, but this is a most warlike array!" asserted Joe. "Now for mad martial carnage. Me Lord Wallace and me princely aboriginal pard of the turtle totem, your plans have worked well so far, and go to show that you have more perspicacity than is usually allotted to the average human. Verily, this night has given birth to various and strange events, which might well make the hair of a fresh stand on end like quills upon the irritable porcupine."

"Ugh!" came from the throat of the Tonkaway chief, expressing both satisfaction and pleasure.

That our friends had sufficient reasons for these manifestations, we leave the reader to judge.

Not a rifle-shot distant from the edge of the

timber was a solitary warrior, who sat his horse with his lance raised on high, and waving his weapon as a signal, a string of scalps hanging from its point.

The scouts knew that this brave had been sent on the trail of the bandits immediately upon the arrival of the Indians at Wellington ranch, and was now awaiting the war-party. Not a mile distant from this lone red horseman there now came all the surviving Comanche braves in a body, galloping over the soft prairie sward like the wind, their lances glittering like silver in the clear moonlight, their arms circling about their heads, as they swung their torturing quirts about the hams of their flying steeds. On, on they came, eager for blood, and for revenge!

Well did they know, who stood securely in their hiding place and watched the approach of this hideous cavalcade, that the outlaw band of El Negro Bravo was now doomed. That the bandits who now lay dreaming of fresh success would awaken from their slumbers with the horrid war-cries of the merciless Comanches in their ears, soon to sleep again the long, long sleep that knows no waking!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MASSACRE.

THERE was but a moment's consultation between Yellow Bear, the Comanche chief, and his trailer. When this was ended, the former, by a whirl of his lance, ordered an advance. Then on they came.

Although the lurking scouts hated and detested the Mexican bandits, and knew that they deserved no mercy, still, as the long line of braves advanced toward the dark timber within which lay the sleeping band of El Negro Bravo, they shuddered, one and all, at the thought of the fearful massacre that would soon turn moonlit paradise into a pandemonium of horrible sights and sounds.

Grasping his revolver and bowie, each stood, with compressed lips, in their tracks, sheltered from the view of the Comanches by a thin screen of leaves, and all eager, if they but dared, to pour a fusillade of balls into the line of warriors who slowly approached the timber.

The Tonkaway chief stood, his broad breast heaving with suppressed passion, his eyes glittering, and the war-cry of his tribe gurgling in his throat, ready to burst forth—so strong indeed was the thirst for battle, and intense hatred for those within his view, shown in the position and expression of Turtle, that Big Foot laid his hand on the shoulder of his red pard, muttering:

"Simmer down a bit, Tonk. We-uns don't come in until we sees which wins, red or yaller; an' hit doesn't amount ter shucks with us which hit are. I tells yer, boys, this are goin' ter be a ga lorious circus."

The Tonkaway stepped back, gave a proud toss of his eagle feathers, and folding his arms replied:

"Big Foot talk heap good. 'Turtle blood hot. Want cut. Want shoot. Want yell. Scouts tie Turtle to tree. May be so he run in fight."

"I'm keepin' my best eye on yer, Tonk," was the reply. "I knows ye're es eager fer Curmanch' blood an' ha'r es a alligator are fer hashin' nigger babies. Yer kin bet yer will git all yer kin 'tend to afore this hifalutin' show are out. I think we'd better go for our shoot-ers, fer we'll need 'em, I'll bet a curral full o' saddle nags. Maybe yer'll run ag'in' Miss Florry, an' ef yer does, tell her ter glide over ther Frio ter our nags, an' lay low. I reckon, on a pinch, she kin find her way over ther drink."

No sooner had the old scout spoken than the chief realized that it was necessary to have their rifles, and he sprang at once into the bush toward the river.

As the Tonkaway disappeared, the long line of braves reached the timber, just west of the positions of the scouts. Here every warrior slid from his pony. Three of the braves caught the ends of the lariats that were attached to the necks of their horses, as the same were thrown to them; then, leaving these three warriors to guard the animals, the war-party vanished within the dark foliage.

"Ef ther hain't ther softest thing I ever see'd since I wore ha'r!" muttered Big Foot. "Come on, boys; we've got some more crawlin' ter do. We'll scout in 'long ther edge o' ther bush, an' when ther jubilee opens we-uns will kinder start a oppersition fandang'. Come on,

Joe an' Ben; we'll snake hit through ther bush ag'in. Hit's about time fer Curmanch' music. I'll do ther biz fer ther funderest red; Ben, yer kin take ther middle cuss, an' Joe the fastest. Dog'd ef they hain't a green lot!"

With these words, the old scout vanished in the thicket.

Fighting Ben did as directed, without a word; he and Reckless Joe sinking to their knees and following Big Foot.

The Mexicans had spread their serapes beneath the branches on the margin of the opening, to avoid the rays of the moon. Their horses were tearing up the rich grass with avidity, having had but little time to graze since leaving the rendezvous on the Rio San Miguel.

Although the bandits had thrown themselves upon their blankets greatly exhausted from their long rides and loss of sleep, and also with the knowledge that some of their number would keep watch, and acquaint them of the approach of any danger; still, not one had removed the belt that held his knife and revolver, and each slept with his rifle-breech clasped in his hand. They were all desperate outlaws, who knew that the hand of every man was against them; that they would receive no mercy from either Rangers or scouts; and that Indians would attack and kill them for their scalps and horses, if for nothing more.

Silently the warriors of Yellow Bear stationed themselves around the opening, but a short distance apart, and within the shades of the timber; each with arrow half drawn to head, awaiting the signal of their chief. Then the hoot of an owl, given in a peculiar manner, broke on the air, followed by the terrible Comanche war-cry, which came from the throats of the whole party simultaneously; then, as the hellish din subsided, and the startled Mexicans endeavored to throw off their blankets, the twang of bow-strings ran around the circle, followed by piercing shrieks of agony, and the rattling irregular discharge of firearms. Once again rung the war-whoop, as out from the bushes sprang the circle of braves, with knives and lances in hand. Many of the bandits were badly wounded by the arrows that were shot into their faces and necks, the Indians well knowing it was impossible to pierce the thick woolen serapes that were wrapped about their bodies. But few of the Comanches had been killed by the wild shooting of the Mexicans, who were but half-awakened ere they were clasped in a hand to hand conflict with the savages.

The followers of El Negro Bravo fell upon all sides, loudly calling for their chief. In five minutes from the time the signal note of Yellow Bear was given, he sounded the war-whoop of victory from the middle of the opening; while here and there his warriors tore the scalps from the ghastly-mangled dead.

Meanwhile the scouts had not been idle; for, knowing that much depended upon every moment of time, they sprang from the thicket at the sound of the first war-whoop, knifed the three braves who had been left in charge of the ponies, and then, with quick movements, cut each lariat from the necks of the terrified animals, and started the horses of the war-party in a wild stampede over the plain.

At this moment, the Tonkaway appeared upon the scene with the rifles; and, as he passed one to each of the scouts, he gazed over the prairie after the fast-disappearing mustangs, exclaiming:

"My white brothers' eyes open. My white brothers great chiefs. Comanches must wear calico. They are squaws."

"Hit war a boss keard we-uns played this time, Tonk', by jingo," said Big Foot, as he took his rifle. "Yer jest in time, pard. Did yer catch a peep o' Miss Florry?"

"No see Flower of Frio. Maybe so she go to ranch. Come. Must run quick. Must shoot Comanche dogs."

"Lead on, Tonk'. We-uns bes gut our paws inter this biz, an' are ready fer blood an' thunder; not bein' pertickler how hit are mixed. Come on, boys; we'll foller up ther keards, er be apt ter lose ther game."

Bounding through the timber for fifty yards, the chief then turned in a westerly direction, followed by the scouts, who knew by the sounds that the short and determined action would soon be over.

But a few rods were traversed in this direction before Turtle, waving his hand in caution, sunk to the earth, and the scouts found upon reaching the spot that he had come to a dry

gully, which led up toward the bandit camp. As they gazed downward they heard a struggle below them, and saw their red friend engaged in a conflict with one of the Mexicans, who had been flying for his life from the Comanches; but as the scout sprung down to the aid of the chief, the war-cry of the Tonkaway burst in low, vengeful tone from the latter, as, with one foot upon the breast of the bandit, he whirled the reeking scalp of his gasping foe in the air.

Only for an instant did this delay them. Then all dashed up the gully, which grew more shallow as they approached the scene of the late fearful conflict.

Here and there the mustangs of the bandits went crashing through the bushes, having broken their lariats, and been stampeded by the war-whoops of the Comanches.

Our friends were soon forced, by the shallowness of the gully, to crawl upon hands and knees; in this way reaching a point at which they could part the bushes and see into the opening a short time after Yellow Bear had given his yell of victory.

The scene was one that caused the scouts, although well used to savage warfare, to shudder with horror and grate their teeth in their strong desire to rid the earth of such brutal fiends as these who were now mingling their fiendish yells with the death songs and the dying groans of their own uncared for wounded.

Yellow Bear now gave a rallying cry which caused his followers to desist from their hellish work, though with seeming reluctance, and approach him.

"All ready, pards," whispered Big Foot. "Pick triggers lively, an' bore every red what glides this a-ways, with yer sixes. We can thin 'em right smart with our rifles 'fore hit comes ter close quarters. Tonk', wait fer we-uns. Zip!"

The four rifles belched fire at the same moment, the balls flying with terrific velocity, at short range, through the massed Indians; and the latter, in their astonishment, perplexity and horror at seeing their comrades fall to earth, at hearing the loud report of the guns, and the yells and cries of agony, before they could recover themselves another volley was poured into their ranks, and the Tonkaway war cry and Texan yells burst from the thicket whence the deadly shots had proceeded.

Yellow Bear, furious with rage and desperation, sprung forward, with knife uplifted; but, at this instant, it struck him that he was ignorant of the strength of his foes, and he drew back, signaling his warriors, who now let fly a shower of arrows into the thicket; but these were easily avoided by the scouts lying down in the gully.

As soon as their arrows had been fired, Yellow Bear, with his surviving braves, some twenty in number, dashed across the opening, over the dead Mexicans, toward the point where their horses had been left.

It is very seldom that an Apache or a Comanche will make an attack on foot, in fact, only in cases like the one we have recorded, where it was impossible to charge into the camp mounted. So it was that they were now bewildered and unable to defend themselves to advantage. The tribes known as horse-riders are always out of their element when on foot, but are probably the most graceful and daring riders in the world.

But a few yards now intervened between the Comanches and the edge of the wood that bordered the east side of the bandit camp, when again came a half-dozen shots in their faces from the front, and three more braves gave the death-howl, while yells of agony shot from the lips of others. Never was a victory so complete, turned in a moment's time to an utter defeat, leaving the but now exultant victors a demoralized, horror-stricken mob.

Yellow Bear, with a ball in his thigh, gave a signal whoop and started for cover; when to his increased amazement, a gray-haired white man sprung toward him from the bushes, knife in hand, and the two became engaged in a deadly conflict.

The warriors halted in their tracks, when, with ringing cheer and yell, the Texans and the Tonkaway chief bounded over the corpse-strewn camp, charging with their six-shooters. For a moment or two longer, the Rio timber resounded with a mixed din of rattling revolver-shots, clashing steel, and shrieks of agony, resounding with dying groans, death songs, and victorious whoops; while, cutting through all, rang the oft-repeated war-cry of the

Tonkaway chief, as his knife crashed through flesh and bone, or circled about the skulls of his hated foes. It was Turtle's hour of triumph.

Big Foot, unmindful of the others, rushed immediately toward the lone white man, whom he had recognized as Colonel Wellington, eager to save the life of the old man; but the scout was unable to get near the struggling pair.

The old colonel seemed to possess the strength of a Hercules, and his eyes blazed with fury, as he cut and thrust, with electric-like velocity, toward the breast of Yellow Bear. Here and there, now close-locked, now on the sward, and then standing erect, with muscles drawn and swollen, with the eyes of each gazing hate into the other's; these two men made such rapid changes that it was impossible, at times, to distinguish one from the other.

At length, however, the powers of the old colonel began to wax low, and Yellow Bear threw him away from him, with a strength which was born of long-baffled rage and the desperation of madness. He then sprung forward upon him, his knife uplifted; but, at this crisis, the Tonkaway chief bounded between the combatants, and with a bantering yell of exultation, he spat directly in the face of the Comanche chief, holding up his hands and knife dripping with fresh gore, and then pointing to the scalps at his belt.

One quick glance showed Yellow Bear that his braves were either all slain, or had fled, and that his own time had come to die; but not a tremor of fear disturbed the proud poise of his battle-braced form, not the slightest change in the glare of deadly hate in his snake-like eyes, until he recognized who and what it was that now stood before him.

For an instant, these two chiefs, those iron-framed red sons of Nature, stood gazing into each other's eyes; the one filled with undying hate, while this expression in the other changed, as Yellow Bear, with superstitious awe, realized that the dreaded Tonkaway again stood before him, with flaunting eagle-feathers, turtle totem, and war-stripes—realized that he now saw the self-same chief that he had danced around, when burning him to ashes but the evening before.

One strange, awe-struck look did Yellow Bear cast at Turtle the Tonkaway; then his eyes rolled skyward, his head leaned back, his hands flew upward, and his knife dropped to the earth!

Thus stood the great Comanche chief, his eyes fixed upon the heavens, while from his lips, in doleful chant, rolled out the death-song of his people!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PURSUIT.

"WELL, my little wife, that is to be, you didn't expect, when your red friend cut you loose, that I was waiting to clasp you in a loving embrace?"

El Negro had gained a safe distance from his sleeping band, when he thus addressed his captive. Removing the gag from Flora's mouth, he continued:

"On the lonely journey that is before us, I would like very much the pleasure of listening to your entertaining comments as to the situation of your affairs at this time."

As the bandit chief thus spoke, he cast a glance over his back trail, and saw a horseman bound out from the dark woods of the Rio Frio and then gallop toward him, keeping close along the line of timber.

With feelings now of deep apprehension, the outlaw lashed his horse, and the horse upon which his captive was bound, with the end of his lariat, and dashed furiously onward.

Despairing and suffering though Flora Wellington was, the change of manner in her captor now aroused her.

Turning her head to the rear, as the horses darted on over the moonlit plain, to her great joy she saw the horseman whom the bandit had discovered, flying along the line of bottom-timber, as if bent upon cutting off, and preventing El Negro Bravo from entering the woods.

The stranger horseman was nearly a mile distant, but would not be more than three-fourths of a mile were he directly on their trail. Words are too tame and meaningless to express the joy of our heroine when, after some length of time, she saw that the stranger was making great efforts, and with good chances of success, to prevent the bandit chief from

entering the cover of the timber where it would be almost impossible, with any speed, to follow them.

Flora supposed their pursuer to be one of the scouts whom Turtle had found down the Rio Frio, encamped with Big Foot Wallace, and had guided to Wellington Ranch to assist in defending her home against the Comanches; and she hoped that it might be the celebrated scout himself, but was unable to decide at such a distance in the moonlight.

She now glanced toward the bandit chief, and saw that his face was filled with fury, as he lashed the horses on toward the west; but it was evident, after a run of a few miles, that the stranger was better mounted and had gained at least half the distance which at the first separated them. Besides this, he was quartering in his course, at such an angle as to cause El Negro Bravo to head further and further from the Frio, and out on the level, far-stretching plain.

Furious, and yet more furious, grew the outlaw, as at last the horses galloped in a labored lope, panting and covered with foam; for he knew that such a headlong race could not last, with animals that had undergone the fatigue which his had so very recently.

Naturally a coward at heart, El Negro Bravo, having, in a treacherous manner, severed the bonds which connected him with the cut-throat gang of Mexicans, and knowing that he must from henceforth fight his own battles, shrunk from coming in contact with one of the Texan avengers, who, he knew, would show him no mercy.

On and on, at break-neck speed, went the pursued and the pursuer; poor Flora, racked with pain, as the cruel cords cut into her flesh at every bound of the horse. Still, she bore this heroically, and at times gazed over her shoulder, praying that God would favor him who appeared bent upon saving her, at all hazards, from a fate that was infinitely worse than death.

Minute after minute was passed over, and nearer and nearer approached the stranger horseman, but still being beyond rifle range, a fact which did not matter as far as that went, as it would have been impossible to hit the bandit, as he rode on the opposite side of his captive from the pursuer. Suddenly, far ahead of them, Flora noticed a lone mesquite tree, some twenty feet in height, and half that distance from the ground being devoid of branches.

Under the most ordinary of circumstances this tree would have attracted notice, it being the only break in the level plain for many miles; but to Flora, after a moment's thought, it became of the deepest interest, and she determined to make use of it in bringing to an end her torturing gallop, though it might be at the risk of her life.

She reasoned that, if their pursuer got within rifle range, he would fear to shoot lest he might injure her; and the bandit, who had a Sharp's rifle, would have the advantage on that score, and would without doubt let fly a half-dozen shots, some of which must take effect in man or beast, and then she would be forever lost.

From the course in which he had pointed, she knew that not an idea had entered the mind of El Negro Bravo as to the chance of the tree ahead affording her the means of escape; for he was guiding his horse at this moment, directly toward it. The gaze of the young girl being now directed particularly toward the mesquite with intense interest and concern, and also to the nature of the ground in its vicinity, she discovered that beyond the same, to the west, and a rifle shot from it, was a break in the plain, indicating an arroyo, and that a small gully branched from this easterly, and to within but a few feet of the tree.

The extreme anxiety of the bandit chief, his attention being fixed upon the pursuing horseman, caused him to neglect a thorough inspection of the ground ahead; although the gray light of morning now streaked the eastern sky, and should have shown him that he could not make any further progress in the direction in which he was going.

The fact, that doubtless the arroyo would put an end to the chase, did not once occur to Flora, she being entirely occupied with her own plan in connection with the lone mesquite tree.

A lariat had been secured to the neck of the horse upon which the captive was bound, its opposite end being made fast to the horn of El Negro Bravo's saddle, leaving some fifteen feet

slack between the animals; and this fact, together with the sight of the tree, had given Flora her idea as to bringing this dread gallop to an end, although it would be a most perilous undertaking.

Bending her head forward with an air of intense grief and pain in her face, Flora awaited the opportune moment, with great anxiety and fear as to the successful accomplishment of her design. Much to her joy, El Negro Bravo kept in a mustang path, which led directly past the tree, and within some five feet of its trunk.

The animals were still on the gallop, but with greatly lessened speed; and, breathing a prayer as they drew near the mesquite, our heroine threw herself forward in her saddle on the left side of the horse's neck, and gave one loud, piercing shriek.

With a snort of terror, the horse to which she was bound sheered off to the right of the tree, leaving the steed of the bandit to the left, and the next instant Flora was thrown senseless to the earth.

The sudden jerk, caused by the lariat which was attached to the horses striking the tree, and which threw the captive to the ground, snapping the lariat as if it had been a reed, did not, however, unseat El Negro Bravo, for the rope parted at his saddle-horn. But the scream and the accident gave his horse a fright, and the animal bounded a number of rods away before his rider succeeded in bringing him to a halt.

Boiling over with rage, and filling the air with his curses, El Negro Bravo turned his horse toward the mesquite, observing now that his pursuer was coming up at a quick gallop and was within rifle range; but his rage was doubled, and his mind filled with the greatest astonishment, when he recognized in the man who dashed toward him with his rifle ready, none other than Clarence Carrolton, whose name and character he had stolen.

Spurring his horse toward the prostrate form of Flora Wellington, the bandit chief shook his fist at the New Yorker; but, at that instant, a revolver belched fire from the gully within twenty feet of El Negro Bravo, the bullet tearing through the clinched fist and shattering every bone in his hand.

With a yell of pain and terror the outlaw glanced below him to the point from whence the shot had come, and there saw, with bare head, long, tangled hair and scratched features, with clothing torn to shreds, and eyes glaring in demoniac fury and thirst for revenge—there, with his revolver elevated as he clambered up the bank, was Monte Mose!

At this moment the sharp crack of Carrolton's rifle broke on the air, the bullet sending El Negro Bravo's sombrero whirling from his head; then, with a cry of baffled rage, combined with the intensest fear and agony, the bandit chief grasped his bridle-rein and whirled his horse.

Just as El Negro Bravo turned toward the west to flee, another shot came from the revolver of Monte Mose, crashing through the clinched bridle-hand in the same manner as the first shot had shattered its mate, parting the reins at the same time, and the mustang, no longer held on a westward course, and seeing the arroyo in its front, whirled about and dashed snorting along on the back trail toward the east.

Clarence Carrolton sat his horse in astonishment at the sudden and unexpected change in affairs in a moment's time; and as this man who had held the lady captive, and whom he had been pursuing, galloped past him with both hands held upward, streaming with blood, and with a hellish expression of malignant hate and agony upon his face, he recognized him as the same person whom he had seen at the Menger Hotel in company with Antonio, and also when at the Bull's Head, rescuing the same Mexican, who had attempted his assassination from his crucified position on the door.

Only for an instant did Clarence gaze upon the maimed wretch, as his horse carried him eastward; then the New Yorker spurred on toward the tree, to be again surprised by Monte Mose, whose appearance was truly terrible. Mounted upon the horse from which Flora Wellington had been thrown, and which he had seized, Mose urged the animal, by loud cry and prick of bowie, on after the fearfully wounded and now helpless bandit chief.

Clarence shuddered from head to foot as he saw the insane thirst for vengeance that flashed from the blood-shot eyes of Monte Mose, who took no notice whatever of the New

Yorker; and greatly puzzled was the latter to form an opinion as to who this avenger might be who had appeared so opportunely, and, as it were, from the bowels of the earth, but who had evidently not seen nor known of Flora Wellington.

The man, Clarence thought, must have been asleep in the gully when the young lady was thrown from her horse, and had just awakened in time to discover a man who had been a merciless enemy to him, now at his mercy.

All this occurred in a moment's time, during which Clarence reached the mesquite tree, sprang to the ground, and tenderly lifted the form of the beautiful girl, who, he had good reason to think, must be the missing Flora Wellington, in whose service he had come to Texas.

Flora, when hurled to the earth, had rolled into the gully, a short distance above the point where Monte Mose lay; and as there was an abrupt bend in the same, the young man had not seen her, or perhaps El Negro Bravo would have stood a better chance of escaping unharmed.

Clarence Carrolton laid Flora upon the grass at the foot of the lone tree that, for all he knew to the contrary, might have caused her death. Procuring a flask of brandy from his saddle-bags, and taking his canteen and tin cup, he mixed some spirits and water, and then bathed the head and moistened the lips of the fair girl, whom he had met for the first time in so strange a manner.

The terrible experiences of the night, however, joined to the weary and painful ride, and the shock she had received in the fall from her horse, were more than the delicate girl could well bear, and retain her faculties; and Clarence, after several vain attempts to revive her, nothing but faint moans rewarding him, folded her in his arms, climbed into his saddle, and rode rapidly eastward, toward the bandit camp—fearing that the fair captive had been released only at the sacrifice of her life.

CHAPTER XXX.

STRANGE VISITORS.

"He's a brave man, ef he are a Curmanch'," said the old scout, as the doomed chief chanted his death-song; "let ther Great Spirit take him, in His own good time."

The desperate bravery of Yellow Bear had greatly impressed Big Foot Wallace; and the Tonkaway chief now gave a puzzled look at him, and lowered the knife which his strong arm was about to hurl at his enemy.

Whether the humane counsel of Big Foot would have benefited the Comanche chief as far as Turtle was concerned, we do not know; but the influence of the former on his red pard was not destined to be put to the test, for at the moment that the scout spoke, a lance was hurled with great velocity past the Tonkaway's head, piercing the breast of Yellow Bear, and literally impaling him. A moment he stood tottering, clasping the weapon that pierced his vitals, and then slowly, like an undermined forest pine, sunk over to the earth, his song and life ended.

Turning quickly to discover from what source the lance had been cast, Big Foot saw Colonel Wellington, now sinking to the sward, his hand pressed to his breast, and the blood oozing out between his fingers.

The old scout now knew that the colonel had been stabbed by Yellow Bear, in the conflict, and he sprang to the side of his friend, just as Reckless Joe and Fighting Ben returned from chasing the few retreating Comanches.

Colonel Wellington was carried by the scouts, through the bottom, to the edge of the timber, where the Indians had left their animals when about to attack the bandits. Here he was laid upon blankets, and tenderly cared for by Joe, while Turtle, Big Foot and Ben crossed the river for their horses, and began to collect the scattered mustangs of the Mexicans, that were plunging here and there through the timber.

This done, all gathered at the bandit camp, where they soon discovered that El Negro Bravo was not among the slain. By this time the sun had risen, and shone smilingly upon all alike—the weary and the wounded, the living and the dead—while the air was filled with red-jowled buzzards, soaring over the corpse-strewn plain.

Wondering why it was that Carrolton had not appeared upon hearing the report of firearms, Turtle was dispatched to follow his trail,

through the bottom, to the point where he had been directed to watch the plain to the west of the bandit camp.

The Tonkaway easily traced up the course of the New Yorker after getting beyond the space that had been trampled by the stampede. From this station the chief followed the trail over the plain, along the line of timber, and noticing that the horse of Clarence had been put to great speed in a westerly direction. It was evident to him, therefore, that their friend had seen some one leave the camp of the Mexicans, and had gone in pursuit. Following the sign, the keen eyes of Turtle detected a plain trail where two horses had brushed the dew from the grass with their fast flying hoofs, and soon he came to the spot where El Negro Bravo had removed the gag from the mouth of Flora; the wad of buckskin lying in the grass, and by the side of it, a ragged scrap of cloth, which the chief knew had been torn from the dress of the girl who had been his best friend on earth.

It required but a short study of the trail to decide that one of the horses had been led; and from this, the Tonkaway decided in his own mind that, as El Negro Bravo had not been killed, he must have recaptured Flora, and escaped with her previous to the attack of the Comanches.

No sooner had Turtle arrived at this decision than he put his horse to full speed on the trail, resolved to again rescue the Flower of the Frio. It was not long before he came in sight of those who had started east from the arroyo. He observed first, with astonishment, the bandit chief speeding over the prairie, followed by a wild-looking white man, who seemed bent on killing him.

Turtle permitted these men to pass him unmolested, and soon joined Carrolton; who, to the great joy of the chief, held Flora Wellington in his arms, seemingly uninjured, and as cheerful as could have been expected, after the fearfully depressing experiences of the past night.

It was very evident to the chief that Flora was well pleased to be in the company of her rescuer, and he turned his horse and proceeded back with them to the bandit camp. Thus did the brave girl and her loved guardian meet.

To return to the scene of the conflict; where the triangular battle had waged so disastrously to two of the parties engaged in it, and where Colonel Wellington now lay dying from the knife wound inflicted by the Comanche chief.

"How are the ole man gittin' along, Joe?" asked Big Foot, returning with Ben from corraling the ponies of the Comanches. He spoke in a voice of the deepest concern.

"He seems to be asleep now," was the reply; "but he has lost a large quantity of blood, and I do not think he can possibly live. He certainly would not survive a removal to the ranch, as you proposed."

"Wa-al, I reckon we-'uns kin stop hyer a while; but I wonder whar in ther dickens ther Carrolton shy'd off ter, an' hit's gittin' 'mazin' strange ther ther Tonk' don't show up. 'Sides we-'uns doesn't know, dead sure, whar Miss Florry hev skooted ter. Things are gittin' mixed ag'in, dog-goned ef they ain't, an' I war jest countin' on a rest an' a snooze."

"I can throw off on myself as far as sleep goes," affirmed Joe; "but I'm not going to allow my stomach to suffer much longer. Ben, don't you think you could knock a deer over, up-stream, around the bend?"

"I don't know," was the reply; "but I am about to make a big try for it." And Ben shouldered his rifle and started.

"Dog-gone ther pesky Irisher!" exclaimed Big Foot, as he gazed down the Frio. "Hit are 'bout time he showed hisself too. I'd like ter see his ugly pictur', an' Diablo likewise. Ef he'd only come with ther mule, an' camp tricks, an' fixin's, we-'uns c'd slap up a equal' feed o' bacon, an' coffee, an' corn-pone."

"He may fetch up yet, me lord Wallace," said Joe, "but I don't think that Patsey O'Horan is up to backing a mule of Diablo's understanding and projectabilities. If he puts in an appearance at all, I am inclined to think he will be mounted simply on his brogues."

"Dog-gone my half-sister's black cat!"

This ejaculation from the old scout caused Joe to look up; and, guided by Big Foot's stare, he saw Fighting Ben returning from the bend at a hard gallop.

"What the deuce is the matter now?" questioned Joe.

"Blamed ef I kin guess, Joel! Strange things turns up so dang'd sudden an' queer,

that I'm gettin' ready for ther see ther sun flop over and stompede, one of these days. Ben hev see'd somethin', bet yer sculp! Thar! What did I tell yer? Who's thet comin' on ther whiz? B'ilin' Bell-ze-bub! What's up, Ben?"

Fighting Ben galloped into camp, at this instant, and yelled, as he sprung from his horse:

"Visitors, boys! Visitors for camp Wellington! And one will have to be fed with a spoon. Carrolton, the Tonkaway, and Miss Flora are all O. K.; coming right in!"

"Hur-ra-a-a! Tonk's a brick!" shouted the old scout.

Ben hastily secured his horse, drew his revolver, and stood facing the two horsemen who first rode up. They were none other than El Negro Bravo, and Monte Mose.

The horse of the bandit, having its own free will, naturally galloped back to the place whence it had come, and seeing the mustangs of the scouts, bounded directly into the camp; the outlaw, with his face ghastly from fear and the kiss of blood, holding his shattered hands upward, from which the gore had dripped, and spattered both man and beast.

With a heavy groan he now rolled over, and lay senseless upon the grass, the shattered bones of his mangled hands protruding from the flesh in all directions.

"Gentlemen," said Fighting Ben, "allow me to introduce to you, El Negro Bravo, the chief of the Chaparral Cocks. You'll have to excuse his unceremonious arrival, and his somewhat unpolished appearance. He does not use cards on the plains, although he generally carries a goodly supply in his boots and sleeves when he is in town."

As Ben spoke Monte Mose thundered into the camp, and halted within ten feet of the senseless bandit chief. One look of intense hate he gave toward his prostrate foe, and then slipped from his saddle, his knife in his hand.

"Hold, pard!" exclaimed Ben. "I have no doubt you owe that villain a heavy score; but, don't you see he is badly wounded, perhaps dead? And if he is not dead, he merits death by the rope. Do you understand, my friend? Here, Joe; have you any spirits? Give this poor fellow a drink!"

"I generally have a supply of spirits of some kind, me lord," replied Joe; "and our friend here shall have the best part of a flask I have in my saddle-bags. He looks as though he had been playing Mazeppa."

So saying, Joe produced a quart flask, and passed it to Ben, who placed it to the lips of Monte Mose; the latter having suddenly become weak, and trembling like a paralytic. No sooner did the scent of the liquor penetrate his nostrils than he straightened up, grasped the flask, and swallowed a deep draught, with evident satisfaction.

With a hoarsely muttered "thanks," he then fixed his eyes upon the livid face of Colonel Wellington for a moment, and then sunk to the ground by the side of the old man who had been his comrade for a part of the previous night.

Grasping the colonel's hand, he sat by his side, while the scouts stood looking upon him in wonder. They observed that a change had come over the old man's face; a condition of things which, they felt, pointed to death, or to recovery.

Vacantly, Colonel Wellington looked around him; then his eyes rested on the young man by his side, and he laid his hand suddenly upon his bare, and thorn-scratched right arm.

"Gin ther curnil a sup o' brandy, Joe," said Big Foot; an' chuck a couple o' saddles under his shoulders. He hev gut a heap ter say 'bout somethin', an' can't shoot off a word."

Reckless Joe quickly did as the old scout suggested; and the colonel, still unable to speak, pointed to the peculiar mark on the arm of Mose, between the elbow and the shoulder.

"I see," said Ben; "a Greek cross, with a thistle and shamrock."

A look of joy overspread the face of the old man, and then his eyes closed, and he relapsed into insensibility.

All this time Monte Mose remained in the same position, looking eagerly into the face of the colonel, without speaking a word. At last he threw himself on the grass, and buried his face, in seeming agony.

"Gentlemen," said Reckless Joe, "there is something on the old man's mind in regard to that poor fellow which we ought to know, and which he wishes us to know. We must keep him alive, if possible, until he can divulge his

secret. Ben, have you any idea who the man is? Have you ever seen him before?"

"I do not know," returned Ben; "his face seems familiar, but I cannot say where I have met him."

"Heavens and earth!" said the other. "If I know myself, it is Monte Mose, from the Bull's Head."

"You are right, Joe, as I am a sinner! I place him now. But who would have thought of seeing him here? And what do you suppose, can the colonel mean by calling attention to that mark upon his arm?"

"That's a question which Colonel Wellington alone can answer, I imagine. It smacks something of the long-lost brother biz, in the 'Old Bowery.' But here comes the other visitors! I tell you, boys, I don't like to stay and see Miss Flora look on her dying father."

"Don't yer stir a peg, Joel!" ordered the old scout.

Up rode the Tonkaway and sprung from his mustang, followed by Carrolton with Flora. The chief stepped forward, and the young girl slid down into his arms. Turtle then placed her upon her feet, opposite the senseless form of her father; the scouts all removing their sombreros, and standing with bowed heads, out of respect for her great grief.

Flora, although she had been informed by the Tonkaway of the condition of her guardian, and was therefore in a measure prepared for a painful sight, burst out in a cry of anguish, as she caught a view of the dying face.

Down upon the green sward she threw herself, by the side of her revered guardian, while the tears ran down her cheeks, and her form was convulsed with heavy sobs.

Clarence Carrolton stood, shading his eyes with his hand; the rough, but tender-hearted scouts turned aside to hide their own tear-blinded eyes; and the Tonkaway glided away, with a stern look upon his dark face, disappearing from view amid the timber.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

EL NEGRO BRAVO lay where he had fallen, some little distance from the position of the colonel, and had not received the slightest notice from the last arrivals.

The scouts were standing in such a manner as to prevent Flora from seeing the bandit. While they were thus grouped, the Tonkaway having retired to the timber, Monte Mose sprung to his feet, gazed wildly around him, and ran his fingers over his forehead and through his tangled hair.

This sudden motion drew the attention of Clarence, and, pulling a paper from his side-pocket, and glancing first at it and then at the arm of the young man, he said:

"Excuse me, sir, but did you not write this note?"

Mose, whose brain had by this time become clear, glanced at the paper, and replied, in a low, husky voice:

"Why do you ask, sir?"

"For very good reasons, I assure you," was the answer.

"Well," said Mose, "if it will give you any satisfaction to know it, I will affirm that I did write that note to warn you against the plots of the man who lies there, and who is, as you must be aware, an outlaw."

With these words, he pointed to the form of El Negro Bravo.

"Then you did not know," inquired Carrolton, "that there was a large reward offered in the San Antonio papers, for the writer of this kindly warning?"

So saying, Clarence grasped the hand of the young man, exclaiming in a tone of heartiest congratulation:

"Mr. Frank Frazier! I am rejoiced to find you. I offered the reward of which I have just spoken, and I am glad to have the pleasure of informing you that you are co-heir to a vast property in New York, approaching a million and a half of dollars. Also that—"

As Clarence mentioned the name of Frank Frazier, Flora arose to her feet and turned toward him.

"Also that," he continued, "you who, it seems, have been a nameless wanderer, without kith or kin, have one of the most angelic sisters man ever had. Miss Flora Wellington, or Frazier, allow me to introduce to you your brother, Frank Frazier! Gentlemen, you all have the pleasure of seeing a brother and a

sister brought together who now meet for the first time in their lives."

Flora advanced joyfully, her hands extended to her brother, but the young man shrunk from her touch, warding her off with a gesture of horror, much to the surprise of all and the perplexity of the young girl.

"Gentlemen," said Monte Mose, "I know not if what I have now been told is true or false. I hope it is false. I am not mad, though I feel that my conscience will soon drive me so. You, Miss Wellington, forget, I beg of you, the words which this man has spoken. I now stand before you a confessed murderer! I am a criminal, through the plottings of the dastard who lies there, with hands maimed by my pistol-shots. I fell into his snares through drink, being rendered in fact a maniac. I repeat it—I am a murderer—a most cowardly murderer!"

"Be the blind piper of Ballinahack! An' it's Patsey O'Horan 'll take oath that's the biggest lie ye iver tould; an' it's a witness I have that'll stand at me back till prove it!"

Had a shell suddenly exploded in their midst our friends would not have been more astonished than when these words sounded from the bushes near them. Then, from under cover, emerged Patsey, leading Diablo; while, seated upon the mule, her long hair flowing, was Celeste Martinez!

No sooner did the latter catch sight of Monte Mose than she sprung from Diablo and ran to the side of her lover, regardless of the looks of wonder on every side.

"Gracias a Dios!" she exclaimed, falling to her knees.

"I repates it then, Mither Moses; ye didn't kill Mither Conner at all, at all! It's the young lady herself can tell yees all about that same."

Just then El Negro Bravo arose to a sitting posture, gazing around him in terror; and as Celeste caught a glimpse of his brutal features, she cried out excitedly:

"There is the man who killed the old ranchero on the Rio Medina! I saw him from behind the corral, do the deed; and I watched him put Senor Mose by the side of the body, with the bloody cuchilla in his hand!"

Words cannot express the relief and joy which filled the heart of poor Mose as these words were spoken. In an instant he had folded Celeste in a close embrace; then, catching sight of Flora, he sprung to his feet, and attempted to clasp the sister whom now he felt that he might call his own, when like a lightning flash, the Castilian girl drew her dagger and darted toward them, but Carrolton caught the furious maiden, whose eyes blazed with jealous fury, and quieted her by explaining the strange situation, causing the clouds in her fair face to melt, and sweet smiles to take their place.

Then, taking Celeste's hands in his, he thanked her for so nobly risking her life in defense of his.

All were now forced to silence, by the sound of Colonel Wellington's voice. The old man suddenly regained his speech, as he opened his eyes at the sound of familiar voices, and saw Flora and Frank folded in each other's arms.

"Thank God!" came feebly from the lips of the dying man. "At last, as I have often prayed, I see the children of her whom I loved, united. Frank and I were together, my friends, for a part of the fearful night, though I knew him not. We got separated in the timber. Flora, my darling, has any thing been heard in regard to Clarence Carrolton?"

"He is here papa," said Flora, leading Clarence forward; "it was he who saved me from the bandit chief."

"God bless you, sir!" said the colonel. "I have formed a very high opinion of you, which your looks confirm. Tell me if what you wrote me is the case. Do you really intend surrendering the Carrolton estates to my darling Flora and that poor boy? They are, we both know, the legal heirs, by right of birth and blood."

"Before coming to the Rio Frio, Colonel Wellington, I made my will in favor of Miss Flora Frazier. The document is now in the hands of a lawyer in San Antonio. I also left a large amount of bonds subject to her order."

"You have taken a heavy burden from my mind," said the dying man. "You are true and honest—one of a thousand. But you have, I think, a fortune in your own right?"

"Yes, a large fortune—more than I have any use for. But for all that, I would not have spent a dollar from the Carrolton property, if I had been without a cent to my name!"

"I believe you, my friend. Now promise me that you will take my place, and be a guardian to Flora and Frank. You will all be forced to go to New York, but you will not forget me. Tell Turtle to bury me where the waving moss of the Rio Frio will sigh my requiem. What I have lived for all through the latter part of my life is accomplished, and I am willing to die. I go to meet your mother, my children, to tell her that I have fulfilled her dying wish."

The last words were spoken in a broken voice, as those whom he called his children whispered their promises in his ears, and pressed their lips upon his cold brow. Slowly his words fell to whispers and ere his sorrowing friends were aware of it, the soul of John Wellington had gone out in the early morning to meet its mate in the regions of the great unknown.

Clarence Carrolton, having been informed by Flora, during their morning's ride, of the disclosures of the bandit chief in regard to the Carrolton family, now approached El Negro Bravo, and said:

"Now, sir, I wish one word with you! I have reason to believe that you have been on my track since I first arrived in Texas. I saw you at the Menger House, in San Antonio, and again at the Bull's Head, when a Mexican, who was of your party, got in a bad fix, and you liberated him. This same Greaser tried a second time to assassinate me, at the ford down the river, but was foiled, and he lost his life. That he was a tool of yours, I have no doubt; and I am aware that you used him against me particularly. You have betrayed the fact that you know much of the Carrolton family matters, and you have tried to palm yourself off as no less a person than myself. Who are you, and in what manner did you get your knowledge of me and my movements?"

"The game is up with me," said the outlaw, his face contorted with pain and hate, "and I have no object in keeping what you ask from you. I may say that it gives me pleasure to tell you that I have done the best I could to keep the oath I took when your evidence sent me to Sing Sing."

"God Heavens!" exclaimed Clarence. "Can this be Jack Dawson?"

"You've guessed it, Clarence Carter; and if things hadn't turned dead against me on the last quarter, I should have married Flora Frazier, and enjoyed the Carrolton estates. I had found out who Monte Mose was, and had the dead wood on corraling him; indeed I supposed that Antonio had run a knife through his heart, and also old Wellington's, for I sent him back to the cabin for that purpose."

"You ordered Antonio on the back trail," said Carrolton, "to kill the colonel, and Frank Frazier?"

"Yes. I wanted to make sure they were out of my way. I expected the Comanches down on the jump, or I would have done their business with my own bowie. If Antonio had filled the bill, I'd have won the game; but bad luck was uppermost, as I have said, and I give in, beat."

"How did you come to know I was in Texas?"

"I had Mexican spies, as herders, at the ranch, and also detectives in New York in my pay. I escaped from Sing Sing, and fled South, where I fell in with a gambler who knew the whole history of Charley Frazier, who married Mary Carrolton. I made good use of these facts, and all this time I have never lost sight of you, and of my revenge."

Clarence gazed at the bandit chief, whom he had once known as Jack Dawson, with wonder and horror. He turned away from him, and stepped toward the group who were collected near the remains of the old colonel, and as he did so, the sharp crack of a rifle, followed by the Tonkaway war-cry, came from the timber. Unable to account for such an alarm, the scouts rushed in the direction of the sound; but they soon halted, as they discovered Turtle emerge from the dense undergrowth, and slowly approach the camp. All were struck by the imposing manner of the chief, and knew at the first glance that something tragic had happened.

The Tonkaway advanced, with head erect, and in the monotone of his people, chanting the death-song; his hands were held close to his breast, while through his fingers ran little streams of blood over his belt.

Flora and Celeste ran to meet the chief, whom the latter at once recognized; while the men of the party all gathered around him, as

he came to a halt beside the corpse of his old friend, the colonel.

In slow, monotonous chant, Turtle, the brave Tonkaway, recounted the daring deeds of his life, his startled friends, as he came to the close of his death song, listening with wonder, mingled with awe and anguish, as the almost superhuman deeds of this red son of the forest, many of them performed during the night that was passed, seemed mysterious and hardly credible to them. Filled with admiration and gratitude at the self-sacrificing bravery with which their noble friend had faced death for them, they all bowed their heads.

The sad chant at last died slowly away on the prairie air, the proud form of the strong, lithe chief trembled with weakness, and the eagle-feathers of his head-dress shook like aspen leaves.

For a full minute he stood thus; then, gathering all the strength of his mighty frame, he shot from his throat the wild war-cry of his tribe, ringing for the last time through the bottom-timber of the Rio Frio. The arm which held Flora's scarf over the gaping wound fell to his side, his heart's warm blood gushed out on the prairie grass and flowers, and Turtle the Tonkaway sunk into the arms of his white friends, a corpse.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

As the scouts laid the form of the dead Tonkaway chief by the side of that of Colonel Wellington, they observed a fresh scalp in the belt of the former, and upon searching the vicinity from which the shot and yell proceeded, they discovered the body of one of the Mexican bandits.

It was plain to them that this Greaser had escaped from the camp when it was attacked by the Comanches; but, being badly wounded, had secreted himself in the thicket, from which he had given Turtle his death-wound, while with his carbine the chief had afterward killed him, and taken his scalp.

Surprise did not end here; for, when the scouts returned to the camp after this search, their attention was attracted down the trail toward the ford and Wellington Ranch, by a series of yells, and they saw a party, numbering nearly a dozen of rancheros, galloping toward them, who soon halted on the margin of the camp, the leader exclaiming:

"How-dy, boys! How-dy, Big Foot! Reck'n yer hain't see'd nothin' o' that cuss what calls his self El Negro Bravo an' his cut-throat Greasers 'bout this-a-ways?"

"Thar he are," answered the old scout; "thar ther cuss are, an' we-uns 'll be dog-goned glad ter git shed o' him! Yer kin take him offen our han's jest es quick es lubricated lightning, fer we're 'bout played out with fight an' cussedness ginerly. If yer'll gaze inter ther openin', a pistol-shot inside ther bush, yer'll see ther hull capoodle o' Greasers what he's had a-rampin' round ther kinty with him: an' they's all laid out nice for kiote and buzzard lunches, 'sides a heap o' reds. We-uns hes played a double game, an' swept ther board. What devilment hes ther cuss did 'fore he struck ther Frio? Somethin' pesky hellish, er you boys from Tuscoosa wouldn't be lookin' so dang'd full o' fust-class mad!"

"Yer kin bet we-uns feels some like stretchin' a lariat with El Negro Bravo on ther eend of hit," returned the ranchero, as he and his comrades gazed, with concentrated hatred in their eyes, at the bandit chief. "We-uns hes followed his trail from ther Medina River, whar he killed old Conner, and we're mighty glad ef yer hes broke up his lay-out. Reckon he hes bin cuttin' up right peart this-a-ways, by the look o' things, an' ef yer hes 'nuff o' sich biz, we-uns 'll do ther job!"

El Negro Bravo staggered to his feet, ghastly with terror: but the stern, determined Texans led the howling wretch toward his own corpse-strewn camp, and bound him to a tree, he begging piteously to be shot instead of being hung.

Celeste Martinez, Frank Frazier and Flora Frazier were called upon as witnesses; the former giving direct testimony in regard to the murder of Conner. Ten minutes afterward El Negro Bravo, the chief of the long-dreaded murderous Chaparral Cocks, gasped out his miserable life at the end of a lariat.

The bodies of Colonel Wellington and Turtle, the Tonkaway, were buried in one grave in the border of the opening opposite the ranch,

Frank Frazier taking a solemn oath over the tomb, never to drink another glass of the vile poison which had brought him so near to a disgraceful death. And Celeste believed, that after the terrible experiences he had undergone, he would now keep his solemn pledge.

When Celeste Martinez had rushed in terror from the scene of slaughter, she ran, without looking in front of her, and fell into the river, but swam to the opposite side and lay down exhausted. In this condition she was found by Patsey O'Horan, as he was prowling up the river-bottom with Diablo.

The entire party now accompanied the rancheros to the Medina, and from thence went to San Antonio, where the news of their wonderful success in breaking up the gang of bandits, and also a Comanche war-party, had preceded them.

As may be imagined, they met with a hearty reception in the Alamo City, where, after three months' absence in New York on business, Clarence and Frank returned to lead their lovely brides to the altar.

The Don and Donna Martinez were so rejoiced at the return of Celeste, having feared that she was lost forever, that, on being made acquainted with the change in the fortunes of her lover, they made no objections when he again asked of them the hand of their daughter in marriage.

Reckless Joe and Fighting Ben looked after Patsey in San Antonio until the return of Carrolton and Frazier from New York, when the two latter, after their honeymoon, departed for the Frio, taking the Irishman along, engaging him to assist in the care of their stock at Wellington Ranch, where they designed erecting an extensive mansion.

There, to-day, within the cool shades of the timber, on the Rio Frio, many mustangers and Rangers look back with pleasure to the happy hours passed on the hospitable ranches of Frazier and Carrolton.

Reckless Joe and Fighting Ben, both celebrated characters in the Lone Star State at the present time, never passed within a day's ride of Wellington Ranch, without visiting their friends; and Big Foot Wallace, one of the most noted old-time scouts and Rangers of the Southwest, often gallops up the Rio Frio to visit those who honor him for his brave deeds, and noble heart overflowing with joyous, child-like simplicity. His visits are greatly enjoyed by Patsey, to whom the old scout made a present of Diablo.

Never, however, did Wallace leave the vicinity of the upper Frio, without standing for a time by the double grave, to lean upon his rifle and meditate, while he dropped a tear for the old colonel and his red pard, Turtle the Tonkaway.

We think it will be admitted that we have shown, in the character of Celeste, that the old Spanish proverb, "*El corazon manda las carnes*," (The heart bears up the body,) was verified in her case to the very letter; while Jack Dawson, alias El Negro Bravo, ought to have borne in mind another proverb, as ancient as the above, i. e., "*Quien mucho abraza poco aprieta*" (Who grasps too much, grasps little).

And now, dear reader, we bid you adios; and, if in our simple way of delineating frontier life as it really was, and is, in the great Southwest, made up of actual events and living characters and names, we have enabled you to pass even one idle hour in an interesting manner, we are truly thankful, and shall not regret having, for a brief space, laid aside our rifle and revolver to grasp the pen.

THE END.

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